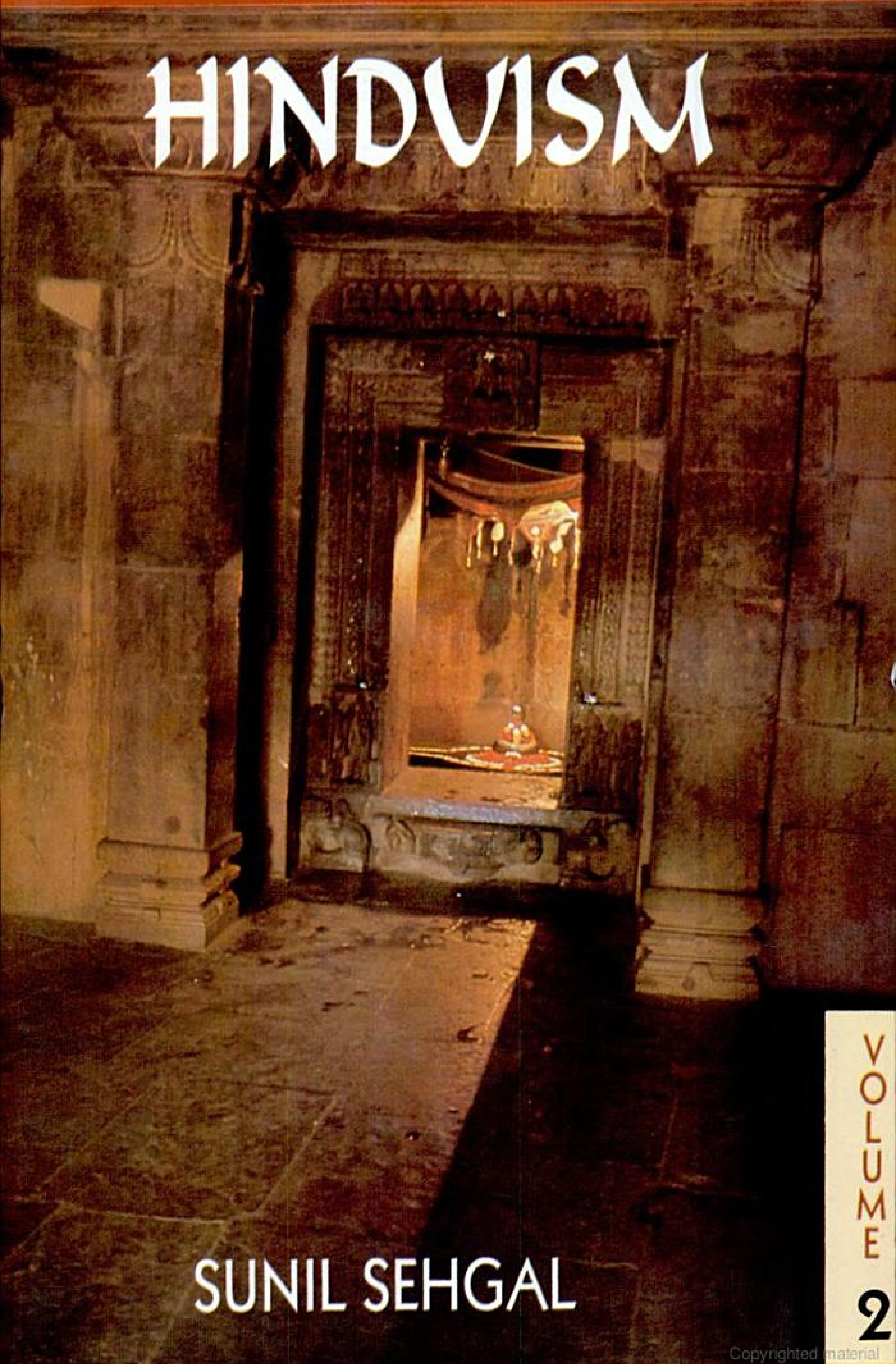
# ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF HINDUISM



VOLUME 2

SUNIL SEHGAL

This multivolume Encyclopaedia is a pioneering attempt to bring together all aspects of Hinduism and contains so many multifarious things to afford us an insight into the deepest depths of the soul of Hinduism. This encyclopaedia is essentially a compilation of the terms and concepts covering various aspects of Hinduism. Many words borrowed for more general usage have been endowed with very special meaning. This encyclopaedia has been compiled, edited and arranged in alphabetical order by a keen scholar of Hinduism. In this encyclopaedia, Hinduism as a religion has been distinguished from Hinduism as a social organisation. On the one hand Hinduism regards god as a super fluity while on the other hand it sponsors a deeply emotional theism as the noblest form of religion. In this encyclopaedia, the entries have been represented in a clear and explanatory style to provide both straight forward definitions and invaluable background information. This encyclopaedia includes material from various Indian and foreign sources which has been compiled and edited by the author to make the set interesting.

This encyclopaedia is for the benefits of students, teachers, and research scholars as well as laymen who wish to know the key aspects of Hinduism as a religion as well as also a social organisation.

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# Encyclopaedia of Hinduism

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**Volume-2**

**(C—G)**

**Sunil Sehgal**

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# Preface

This multivolume Encyclopaedia is a pioneering attempt to bring together all aspects of Hinduism and contains so many multi farious things to afford us an insight into the deepest depths of the soul of Hinduism. This encyclopaedia is essentially a compilation of the terms and concepts covering various aspects of Hinduism. Many words borrowed for more general usage have been endowed with very special meaning. This encyclopaedia has been compiled, edited and arranged in alphabetical order by a keen scholar of Hinduism. In this encyclopaedia, Hinduism as a religion has been distinguished from Hinduism as a social organisation. On the one hand Hinduism regards god as a superfluity while on the other hand it sponsors a deeply emotional theism as the noblest form of religion. In this encyclopaedia, the entries have been represented in a clear and explanatory style to provide both straight forward definitions and invaluable background information. This encyclopaedia includes material from various Indian and foreign sources which has been compiled and edited by the author to make the set interesting.

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# C

**Cakra** (*wheel*)

Embodiment of the creator's mind. Hindu Emerging in the form of a six-spoked wheel (less frequently eight) which also epitomizes the passage of time, and is a symbol of wholeness and protection. particularly associated with Visnu and Krsna, the *cakra* is a common attribute held by many deities, It is probably of great antiquity since it is known from the time of the Indus Valley civilization (prior to 1700 BC). In Jainism and Buddhism it is the 'wheel of the law' which leads to perfection.

**Cakresvari** (*lady of the cakra*)

Goddess of learning. Jain [India]. One of sixteen *vidyadevi* headed by the goddess Sarasvati. Also oneof the twenty-four *sasanadevata* or messenger goddesses.

**Camunda** 1. Goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). A distinct form of Durga. The name is said to be a contraction of the names of the demonic beings Camda and Munda killed by her. She is also recognized amongst the *saptamatara* and *astamatara* mothers as well as sometimes beingregarded as a *navasakti.* She stands variouslyon a lion, an owl and a a corpse. Attributes: a large and varied assortment of objects are held. Three- eyed Also Yami.

2. Goddess, Buddhist. She stands upon a corpse. Colour: red. Attributes: cup and knife.

**Canda** (*violent*)

Terrible goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). A distinct form of Durga and one of a group of nine *navadurgas* ('nine durgas').

Canda, with Munda, was also one of the demons killed by a form of Durga known as Camunda (contraction of the two demonic names). She is depicted with a large number of attributes. Also a form of Mahisasuramardini.

**Candali** (*outcast woman*)

Goddess of terrifying appearance. Buddhist- Lamaist [Tibet]. One of a groupof eight *gauri* goddesses. Colour: red or blue. Attributes: flames.

**Candanayika** (*mistress of the fierce*)

Goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic).A distinct form of Durga and one of a group of nine *navadurgas* ('nine durgas')

**Candarosana**

God. Buddhist (Mahayana). A form of the god Aksobhya Colour: yellow. Attributes: noose, skin and sword.

**Candarupa**

Goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). A distinct form of Durga and one a group of ninee *navadurgas* (''nine durgas')

**Candavati**

Goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic), A distinct form of Durga and one of a group of nine *navadurgas* ('nine durgas')

**Candesvara** *(the lord of Canda)* Minor god. Hindu (Epic and Puranic) A benevolent aspect of Siva. Also an attendant on siva, said to have been a youthful cowherd. He sits on a lotus throne. Attributes: arrow, axe, bow, club, crown, hatchet, noose, rosary, snake, trident and water jar.

**Candesvari** (*fierce lady*)

Minor goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). She stands upon a corpse. Colour: yellow, Attributes: grass and an antelope.

**Candika** (*fierce*)

Goddess of desire. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). May be included amongst the *saptamataras* or *astamataras* (mothers).

**Candogra** (*fierce and terrible*)

Goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). A distinct form of Durga and one of a group of nine navadurgas ('nine durgas')

**Candra**

1. Planet god. Hindu (Epic and puranic). Personified by the moon and also seen as a *dikpala* or guardian of the northern direction. Consorts include Kaumundi, Tara and the *naksatras* of astral goddesses, His son is Budha. He drives in a chariot drawn byu ten white horses. Colour: white. Attributes: club, lotus, sacred rope and prayer wheel. The term *candra* usually refers to the cup containing the sacrificial yellow beverage soma, often a synonym for the deity, *Candra* is also the apotheosis of the pale yellow moon disc.

2. Planet god. Buddhist. Attended by a goose. Colour: white. Attributes: moon disc on a lotus,

**Candrasekhara** (*moon crested*)

Form of the god Siva. Hindu (Puranic). Portrayed standing stiffly upright and wearing snake jewellery with the moon on the left side of his head-dress. Attributes:axe and an antelope.

**Cankilikkaruppan.** (*the black man of the chain*)

Local god. Hindu-Dravidian (Tamil). Worshipped in southern India.

**Carcika** (*repetitive chant*)

Goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). Colour: red. Attributes: cup and knife.

**Cauri**

Goddess of vrrifying appearance. Buddhist and Lamaist [Tibet]. One of a group of eight *gauri* goddesses. Colour: yellow,. Attribute: noose.

**Cenkalaniyammal** (*lady of the red paddyfield*)

Local goddess. Hindu- Dravidian (Tamil). Guardian of paddyfields in southern India.

**Chaitanya**

Mendicant god. Hindu (Puranic). A deifide mortal who became one of the many incarnations of the god Visnu. Born at Nadiya in 1484 AD, he died at Puri in 1527, Chaitanya was a sickly child who, according to legend, was left to his fate, hanging in a tree to die, but was revived by the gods and thus became deified. He was married twice before adopting a strict ascetic existence at the age of twenty-four, from which time he travelled extensively, eventually settling in the holy city of Benares. He is remembered as a great social reformer. His main sanctuary at Nadiya includes a small statue of Krsna to whom he devoted himself.

**Charvaka — The Hindu Materialism**

Its founder was Charaka. The most important book of this system was *Brihaspati Sutra.* I am answering you in past tense, because as far as I know this book is not available in India. We only have quotations from the above book written by other authors to refute the *Charaka* philosophy.

The *Charaka* philosophy is known as *Nastika* philosophy in Hinduism because this philosophy is independent of *Vedic* ideals and principles. It rejected existence of God and considered religion as an aberration.

According to this philosophy: The material world is real and it alone exists; our knowledge of it comes from sense perception. The matter is made of air, earth, fire and water. Consciousness is only a function of matter;

Soul means body; there is no life after death; there is no God; world is made by itself; pursuit of pleasure is the goal of man. The vedas were written by clowns. The law of karma has no basis. This philosophy states enjoy life while you can, for once cremated, you will never return to this earth.

I can go on stating different aspects of this philosophy and they will sound like an atheistic philosophy of today. To be very frank with you. I feel much of the statements of this philosophy are like saying. 'The earth is flat' and so on without any proper basis at all.

At the same time, the mere existence of this philosophy in Hinduism, is the most important symbol of Hindu tolerance. In any other religion, apostles of this type of philosophy would have been crucified or burnt alive.

As I said earlier, this philosophy is non-existent in India now and almost all books on Hinduism do not even mention the mere existence of this ephilosophy once upon a time .

I feel this philosophy originated due to the rigidity of Hindu Orthodoxy in ancient Hinduism and at the same time, it died due to the *utmost freedom* of thought that existed in the later period of Hinduism.

**Chattrosnisa** (with an umbrella)

God. Buddhist. One of eight *usnisa* deities apparently connected with the guardian sky deities or *dikpalas*. Colour: white. Attribute: parasol.

**Chaya** (*shadow*)

Goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). The reflection of the goddess Sanjna, consort of Surya and mother of the astral deity Sani.

**Chinnamastaka** *(decapitated)*

Goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). A beadless form of Durga. Also one of a group of ten mahavidyas, goddesses of great knowledge personifying the Sakti of Siva. She may be depicted holding her bead in her hands. Aspects include Viraratri. Attributes: scimitar, skull. Also Chinnamasta.

**Chos-Skyon** (protector)

Tutelary guardian deity. Buddhist-Lamaist (Tibet). One of a group of gods of fearsome appearance who wear royal apparel. Rides a white elephant. Colour: blue. Attributes: knife and noose.

**Citra** (*bright*)

Minor goddess of misfortune. Hindu (epic and Puranic). A malevolent naksatra or astral deity; daughter of Daksa and wife of Candra (Soma).

**Citrasena** (*having a bright spear*)

Goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). The Sakti of Buddhakapala.

**Cittavasita** (*control of thinking*)

Minor goddess. Buddhist. One of a group of twelve *vasitas* personifying the disciplines of spiritual regeneration. Colour white. Attribute: staff.

**Classical Hinduism** (*The way of action*)

In the sixth century B.C. Indian society entered a period of great transformation. The Aryans, who now occupied the entire Ganges Valley, had cleared away the thickets and plowed the fertile plains. Local chieftains ruling loosely over scattered groups of herders were replaced by kings governing from fortified cities. Over the next four centuries these regional kingdoms gave way to vast empires.

In this more settled world the dominant tensions and stresses of life also changed. As the people became dependent on their fields for their livelihood, military and social controls over them tightened, and economic and political relationships hardened into rigid patterns. The new constraints generated new stresses, which led to alterations in religious life. The old sacrifices of the vedic age were all but swept away. Curiously, the brahmans did not disappear as a priestly class, despite some resentment of the pride and greed that many of them displayed. Eventually the brahmans emerged from the centuries of transition more influential and more honoured among Hindus than ever before.

In the midst of these changes was born classical Hinduism, the religious orthodoxy that has provided a framework for the life of most Indians for well over two thousand years. Indeed, despite innovations introduced by reformers in the last two centuries, classical Hinduism continues to be the dominant religious tradition of India.

**New Literary Forms Sutras**

Between the sixth and second centuries B.C. the vedic guilds turned to a new literary form, called the sutra. A sutra (literally, a

"thread") contains a comprehensive discussion of a subject, expressed in a series of clipped prose sentences intended to be memorized by students in the brahman schools. Students used these topical outlines to achieve a rote mastery of a branch of learning. First they learned to recite the sutra accurately, and next they were taught its meaning through informal lectures.

The earliest of these compositions were the *Srauta Sutras*, which contained instructions for performing the vedic rites. Their appearance in this period shows that some brahmans were continuine to maintain the old vedic sacrifices. Another kind of sutra apppearing at this time were the *Grihya Sutras* (Sutras on domestic rites), which recorded for the first time the ceremonies performed by Aryans in their own homes. By teaching the correct way to conduct family rites, the brahman authors were assuming a new responsibility for showing how persons other than professional priests should perform rites.

**Dharmasutras and Dharmasastras**

The brahman's next compositions were works called *dharmasutras*. Dharma is an abstract concept meaning "pattern of right living." The dharmasutras go beyond discribing the proper way for Aryans to carry out their ritual duties and show, forn the first time in Indian religious literature, a concern for moral behavior as an essential part of one's total religious obligation. Brahmans belonging to the Apastambha, Gautama, Vasishtha, and Baudhayana guilds began producing dharmasutras during approximately the same period in which the hymns of Zarathustrà and the Hebrews' prophetic books were being written. The dharmasutras share with Zarathustra and the Hebrew prophets a new sense of the insufficiency of ritual as the sole concern of religious life. The sacredness of ceremony was not denied by the authors of the dharmasutras, however, and Hinduism has remained to the present a religion of elaborate rites. But the dharmasutras also stress the inportance of ethical behavior and were the first to give instructions in social duty and to require conformity to sacred moral codes. In these writings the brahmans became the general arbiters of correct behavior of all kinds.

At the end of this formative age, the early codes of the dharmasutras were recast into expanded verse compositions called *dharmasastras*, which were easier to memorize and understand. In time, the dharmasastras largely replaced the dharmasutras as guides to ideal social behavior.

**The Laws of Manu**

The most influential of all the dharmasastras was the *Manavadharmasastra.* Attributed to a sage named Manu, it is known in English translation as *The Laws of Manu.* This code, which was probably compiled between 200 B.C. and A.D.200, reflects the notions of the brahmans of that age on how Hindus ought to live. By describing the customs of the most admired classes of society of that time, *The Laws of Manu* established the public norms of classical Hindu society.

Dharma is the pattern of ideal behavior that *The Laws of Manu* and the other Dharmasastras hold up to Hindus as a moral guide. But just what is meant by dharma? In vedic times rta was understood to be the universal moral principle by which all living or moving things operated harmoniously in a changing universe. Dharma is the word that became rta's successor in the parlance of a later society. The word rta is derived from a root meaning "to run" or "to go," whereas dharma comes from a verb *dhri* meaning "to make firm," "to restrain," or "to preserve." Dharma implies therefore a world that is and should be firmly structured. The human world of the new religious ideal of dharma is not conceived to be rightly alterable. Classical Hinduism viewed change as destructive and rejected open innovation.

**The Caste System**

For over two thousand years the caste system has provided the pattern of Hindu society. Castes—called in Sanskrit *jatis*, or "briths" — are hereditary occupational groups that are arranged in an ascending ladder according to popular estimation of the purity and dignity of each group's traditional work.

Firmly hereditary occupational distinctions did not exist among the Aryans prior to their migration to India, and during most of the

vedic age, class distinctions were few and flexible. The vedic poems, however, did mention three social classes: the ebrahmans or priests, the *rajanyas* or *ksatriyas* who served as rulers and leaders in war, and the *vis* or commen people. Although the sons of warriors and priests generally adopted their fathers' occupations, they were not forced to do so. Sons of commoners were not automatically barred from the priesthood or from military leadership, nor were their various crafts and trades hereditary or assigned sharply different degress of dignity.

**Origin of the Social Classes**

The earliest indication of a turn toward complex ranking and strong class feeling is seen is Rigveda 10.90. This creation hymn tells of a sacrifice in which the giant Purusa, a cosmic man with a thousand eyes and feet, became the victim from whose limbs and organs all the prominent features of the world were formed. The social classes of the late vedic time also were thought to have been created from Purusa's body:

*The brahman was his mouth,*

*His two arms became the rajanya*

*His things are what the vaisya is;*

*From his feet the sudra was produced.*

We should note in this verse the appearance of a new, distinctly Indian order of class precedence. In Aryan societies of the Middle East and Europe, the warrior class always occupied the highest level of leadership, but in India the priesthood has from this time onward been supreme and has been the model for much that is distinctive in the standards of Hindu civilization.

In this verse, a new depth of class consciousness is shown: The moderate social differences of earlier vedic times have been sharpened. The Aryans have subjoined to their original three classes a class of menials, the sudras, who have a lower rank than that of ordinary citizens and whose lot in life is to do the most humble tasks.There are now four social divisions ar *varnas* (literally "colors"), based on occupation. Though all four classes

are part of Purusa, or essential humanity, they are separated by the quality of their contributions to society. The sudras are to do the footwork, and the other classes are to carry out functions associated with the nobler parts of the body.

Scholars still have not determined the reasons for this development. It may have been a way to justify the Aryans' control of an indigenous serf population. But the four-class theory of Rigveda 10.90 may be only the first hint of the rising influence of surviving pre-Aryan social practice. The new hierarchial tendency may reflect social discriminations long established among the indigenous population.

**Duties of the Social Classes**

The author of *The Laws of Manu* cites Rigveda 10.90, making its scheme of the four varnas the theoretical basis for the organization of Hindu society. The book's detailed description of the classical social order, however, goes far beyond the vedicideal. The varnas are presented as hereditary, and their inequality in dignity is proclaimed with a new emphasis. There is special stress on the superlative qualifications and rights of the brahmans, whose duty is to perform sacrifices, to study and teach the Vedas, and to guard the rules of dharma (Manu 1.88— 101). Because of their sacred work the brahmans are supreme in purity and rank, and injuries committed against them are punished more severely than offenses against persons of a lower caste. The personal service of sudras is their right at any time. If brahmans are in economic difficulty, they are permitted to take up livelihoods associated with the ksatriya and vaisya classes (*Manu* 10.81 ff.) .

The ksatriyas are warriors and the protectors of society. From this class arose the kings, whose duties are described at great length (*Manu* 7.1 ff., 9.248 ff.). Rulers must heed the counsel of brahmans in all matters related to dharma. The ksatriyas may not presume to do the work of the brahmans, but in time of misfortune they may make their living in occupations designated for the vaisyas and sudras.

According to Manu, members of the vaisya caste are to live by

trading, herding, and farming, but trading is their most distinctive work, (In later times they turned over most of their herding and farming functions to the sudras.) When necessary, the vaisyas may take up the occupations of sudras, but they are never permitted to do the work of brahmans or of ksatriyas. Like the members of the two elite classes, however, vaisyas are considered to be full citizens of Hindu society and are allowed to study the Vedas.

Between the vaisyas and the sudras is a great social gulf. The sudras may not participate in or attend vedic ceremonies, and they are strictly for-bidden to mate with persons of a higher varna. According to Manu, their proper occupation is to serve meekly the three classes above them. The highest possible work of sudras is to engage in handicrafts and manual occupations. They are entitled to receive the broken furniture, of old clothes, and leftover foods of brahman households, and they are to be protected from outright starvation. It is improper for sudras to accumulate wealth, however, and under no circumstances may they assume the work of the other varnas (*Manu* 10.121 ff.).

**People Without Varna**

Below the sudras in Manu's picture is an element of Hindu society having no formal place among the varnas. Manu called them *dasyus*. They are impure groups whose hereditary work is that of hunters, fishemen, leather workers, executioners, and handlers of corpses. Such unclean people must live outside the villages and are not allowed to enter the streets at night. They are to be given food in broken dishes placed on the ground. Hindus are not permitted to associate with them or teach them them dharmasastras (Manu 19.45 ff.). Though the term dasyu in vedic usage meant "aliens" living totally outside, Aryan society, Manu refers to persons living within the brahmanical culture who perform services indispensable to the Hindu communities. They are the groups that have now come to be called "outcastes."

Evidence of the importance of non-Aryan elements in the population is seen also in Manu's frequent references (e.g.,in 10.8 ff.) to more than fifty hereditary groups of workers in important manual occupations which he fails to relate satisfactorily to the

four-varna system. These groups are called jatis, or castes. Each has its own name and its own distinctive caste law (Manu 8.41-46). The jatis are the basic units of the working population.

In ingenious but unconvincing ways Manu seeks to derive all these castes from the four ancient varnas. He describes some of their members as being the offspring of forbidden matings between men and women of different varnas or the descendants of persons expelled from their varnas for neglect of religious duties. It is clear that Manu and the other dharmasastras have tried to synthesize the vedic and indigenous social heritages by accepting the indigenous castes as subdivisions or extensions of the sudra class of the late vedic society. These workers were added to the bottom of the original Aryan classes in such a way as to create a single social ladder whose top rungs continued to be occupied by the brahmans, ksatriyas, and vaisyas. Although the vedic varnas remained the

theoretical basis of classical Hindu society, the non-Aryan jatis became its core, and some unknown extra-vedic social inheritance provided its most powerful intellectual and emotional components. Thus traditions originating outside the Vedas came to dominate later Indian society.

## The Four Stages of Life

Even within the varnas and the jatis recognized in traditional Hindu society, there is further distinction of rank on the basis of sex and seniority. According to the dharmasastras, life is an upward development through four stages of effort called the four asramas, which are the formal age groups for males of the three upper classes. (Sudras, out-castes, and women are not admitted to the asramas.) Persons situated in each asrams are expected to defer to those who have preceded them into a higher stage. The four stages are as follows:

**The Student Stage** Between the ages of eight and twelve a boy of any of the three upper varnas is expected to apply to a teacher and submit to a rite of initiation into the study of the Vedas. The student is to live with his teacher, and the teacher is to instruct the boy in the recitation of the sacred texts. In return, the pupil must obey every command of his teacher, rendering such personal services as bringing fuel and water and serving food. He must show respect to the older man, never addressing him from behind or saying anything the teacher cannot hear. He should not listen to complaints about the teacher even if they are true, and when uttering the teacher's name, he must always add an honorific title.

**The Householder Stage** When the young man concludes his studies, he should marry. In doing so he enters the second asrama, that of the house holder. He must beget sons, and earn a living for himself and his family by work appropriate to members of his caste. In addition, he must give alms to those who have passed into the higher asramas.

The ideal relations between husband and wife are described in The *Laws of Manu* (5.147-158). The householdewr should provide the family's livelihood and try to make his wife happy. His kindness,

however, is not a precondition of his wife's lifelong obligation to show loyalty and subordination to her husband.As long as he lives, she must do nothing that displeases him. After his death she must devote herself to his memory and never even utter the name of another man. "In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, and when her lord is dead, to her sons; a woman must never be independent" (Manu 5.148). Since women are not understood to have entered into any asrama or stage of spiritual effort, the dharmasastras say little about rules governing their conduct.

**Forest Dwellers and Ascetics** When a man has fulfilled his duties as the head of his family and sees that his skin is wrinkled and his hair white (Manu 6.2), he may leave his home and community and proceed into the higher asramas of the forest dwellers and ascetics and thus into religious practices to be carried out in the seclusion of the forest. This departure from home can always be deferred until a future life. The move is actually made by only a very small percentage of the men of any generation. But sannyasa, or the renunciation of the social world, will be necessary, in the end, for all who wish to achieve final salvation.

The distinction between the asramas of the forest dwellers and the ascetics has never been kept clear in actual practice; the use of the two names merely recognizes that hermits pass through several stages in renouncing the life of the world and understanding mystical truth. A man who is a forest dweller may continue his habitual rituals,but when he enters the fourth and last stage, the asrama of the ascetic, he stops performing any of the rituals or social duties of life in the world. Keeping only the most basic personal possessions and caring nothing about the comfort or survival of his body, he devotes himself to reflecting on the scriptures called Unanishads. Meditating on the soul in himself and in all beings, he attains detachment from material things and finds repose in the unity of the eternal Brahman; that is, the world soul. Hindu faith holds that this serene state continues beyond death and that those who know it will never return to this world.

For those committed to the quest for salvation, it is maturity in

spiritual discipline, rather than birth, that gives them rank. But we see here again the Hindu tendency to view all beings as placed in one or another of the stations or a stratified universe. In one sense, men of the third and fourth asramas no longer belong to the social order, but in another sense, these hermits constitute the Hindu world's highest aristocracy. Traditional Hindus honor them as advanced persons who have preceded them in doing what all one day must do. Superior to all other people, they are entitled to unique respect and to unquestioning support.

## Krishnapur: A Modern Survival of the Caste System

The social pattern of classical Hinduism, as seen in *The Laws of Manu*, was characterized by systematic stratification and assignment of dominance, by inegalitarian conceptions of justice, and by severe restraints upon the freedom of individuals. The choice of occupation and of marital partner was restricted, and the freedoms that were allowed were extended unequally according to rank in the social hierarchy. The unequal service required of the various classes was rationalized by the provisions of divine law. The dignity and wealth of any person depended heavily upon that person's caste.

We are interested in knowing whether such a social order as this has been the persistent social background for the thinking and practices of the traditional Hinduism that we are about to study. The dharmasastras have limitations as descriptions of even the ancient Hindu society of their own time. They focus on the life of the upper castes, and to some extent they express the idealizations of the brahmans rather than the actualities of ancient life. Furthermore, we do not know, without confirmation from later ages, that the social order described by Manu has been widespread in India and long-lasting. Therefore it is of immense value to us that the general pattern of living that the dharmasastras describe has survived and is still available for study. Twentieth-century sociologists have found many traditional rural Hindu communities adhering to dharmasastra principles and sharing other ancient characteristics. We shall create from their reports an imaginary traditional village of the present day, which we shall call

Krishnapur. The composite will combine the features that are most often reported in sociological studies of living communities.

Krishnapur, which should be thought of as located in the plains of northern India, has about fifteen hundred inhabitants who belong to some thirty castes. Varnas exist in Krishnapur not as organized social groups, but as categories of social rank with which individuals are connected only indirectly through the varna identification of their castes. Public opinion assigns each caste to one of four varnas or to none he members of some castes believe that their caste deserves of higher classification by reason of its unappreciated virtues and secret noble origins, but the general opinion of their neighbors compels them to be silent. At certain public events in the village, representatives of the castes are required to participate in the order of their precedence, thus publicly acknowledging their rank.

Most of the inhabitants have heard of the dharmasastras, but almost none have read, or could read, those ancient books. They do not attempt to guide their lives by the dharmasastras, but rather assume that the requirements of those respected books were long ago incorporated into the local rules governing village behavior. The ancient pattern of the four varnas provides the community's broad theoretical framework, but the living and dynamic organizations of the village are the jatis that earn their livelihoods by one or another of the village's several dozen specific occupations. In ancient times only the lowest varnas were thus subdivided, but now it is normal for all varnas to be subdivided into castes working at specific jobs. We shall use occupational terminology to identify the castes of Krishnapur's social hierarch.

Among the brahmans we find a caste of priests who perform the rituals of childhood, a second group who officiate at the rites of adulthood, and a third whose duty is to perform the rituals of death. In addition, a village may have among its brahmans a geneologist, an astrologer, and a physician practicing the traditional Indian medicine. Most of the ksatriyas are landowners engaged in farming, though in some villages the brahmans have taken over this occupation. The third varna, the vaisyas, includes the local groups

who keep official records or commercial accounts. Among the vaisyas are also shopkeepers, moneylenders, gold smiths, and dealers in grain and vegetable oils. The sudra castes are the groups that perform manual tasks that are not regarded as grossly impure or morally tainted. Among them are the occupations of florist, truck gardener, mud worker (who makes bricks or looks after irrigation ditches), carpenter, blacksmith, water carrier, herdsman, barber, potter, and tailor. Finally there are outcastes, those who have no varna, whose jobs are thought to be sinful or grossly unclean. They include washermen, sellers of liquor, cotton carders, fishermen, leather workers, toilet cleaners, and handlers of dead bodies.

Each caste is represented by a family or a small group of families, and each governs its internal life by its own traditional caste code. The jatidharma mentioned by Manu is an unwritten code that laye down rules for relationships within families, for relations with colleagues of the same caste, and for personal habits. Matters that in many societies are left to personal taste, custom, or etiquette are firmly regulated in Krishnapur. Each caste has its own rules regarding foods that may not be eaten and persons who may not join caste members at dinner or handle food for them. Restrictions on the company in which orthodox Hindus may dine are so severe that few ever eat with any but members of their own caste. Bodily contact with persons of a lower caste communicates contamination to any individual of higher rank, and from such a tainted person some degree of impurity will be spread to other members of his or her caste in the course of normal association.

When a member has undergone serious contamination, he or she must promptly remove the taint by bathing or by more drastic rites. Members must select mates for their sons and daughters from certain families of the same caste according to intricate rules. Caste rules are enforced by a council of casts elders, who punish offenders with fines and social boycotts.

Another kind of unwritten village code prescribes one's duties to castes other than one's own. It covers economic relations, describing in detail the professional services that each caste is

expected to render to the households of each of the other castes, as well as the services or goods that are to be received from each of them in return. The code also specifies the bearing and speech that is proper in dealing with persons or higher or lower rank. Economically the castes fall into two broad groups: the food producers and the providers of services.

The principal food producers are of course the farmers who grow the community's grains. The second group consists of the many artisans and laborers who offer the goods and services needed to maintain farms and to equip homes. An ingenious exchange of food, goods, and services is the basis of economic life, rather than money payments. The village code outlines the duties of each worker and the share that he shall receive in the farmers' harvests.

Representatives of the town's more prominent castes make up the village council, which supervises all interactions between the castes. Workers who fail to make the traditional contributions to their clients of other castes are brought before the council. After hearing the complaint, the council can bring a rule breaker into line by ordering all castes to shun the offender and cut off all services to him.

Krishnapur is a restrictive society that limits personal freedom—for example, in the choice of mates and occupations—even more severely than the ancient codes did. The caste and village codes establish an order of precedence so precise that no one in the community has an exact equal. Another person is always either one's superior or inferior. Talent and wealth ordinarily bring leadership in one's own caste, but they do not necessarily give the holder eminence in the village as a whole. Formal precedence belongs to those who are born to it, and economic advantages are distributed unequally. The freedom to enter alternate occupations, just as in the teaching of Manu, belongs to the castes of the upper varnas alone. The brahmans and ksatriyas of Krishnapur have used this freedom to acquire and farm the land, a freedom that has helped them in their struggle to survive and hold power.

For at least two thousand years Hindus have accepted the life of communities structured in this pattern. As the persistent social

background of Indian religious thought, this distinctive society has greatly influenced the content of Hindu religion. Sometimes its presence is reflected in the structure of Hindu categories of thought. Sometimes its influence is seen in provision of religious remedies for its special tensions, of compensations for its injuries, and of rational justifications for the social lots that it awards. The explanations of Hindu religious doctrine have allowed this unusual social order to survive and have enabled Hindus to live happily, generation after generation, in one of the most unequal and yet enduring societies that the world has ever known.

**Karma and Rebirth**

The intimate connection between Hindu doctrine and Hindu society is illustrated dramatically in the case of the belief that human beings are reborn again and again to lives of varied fortune in a course controlled by the moral quality of their accumulated deeds. It is an idea central to Hinduism. With slight variations, it is accepted by Buddhists and Jains. The belief in reward and punishment through rebirth appeared at the same time that the classical Hindu society based on caste was organized. Several Upanishads that describe the concept as a new teaching belong to the period when the dharmasutras were outlining the new society that restricted occupational choice. From that time onward, karma, rebirth, and the caste system developed in a combination that became the central pillar of classical Indian culture. To understand the doctrine of *karma* and rebirth solely as a philosophical concept would be to understand only a fraction of its function and power.

In its most rudimentary sense, *karma* means "an action." In ethical discussions it means an action that is morally important because it is an act required or prohibited by the codes of dharma. Karma means next, the unseen energy believed to be generated by the performance of such a dutiful or undutiful act. Long after the visible act has been completed, this energy continues in existence. At an appropriate time, it discharges itself upon the doer, causing that person to experience the consequences of the original act. Accumulated karma gives to some persons well-merited freedom from disease, sharp minds, good looks, virtuous dispositions, and

long lives. It brings the opposite of these benefits to others for equally vaild reasons.

Karma is believed to exert itself with particular force at those times in our individual careers when we are about to be reborn into the world. The determination of our rebirth is such an important function of Karma that the Bhagavadgita, which was composed after the Upanishads, described it as "the creative force that causes the rise of the condition of beings" (8.3). At the moment of our conception in the womb, the moral force of our past deeds is believed to move us, with perfect justice, into a new family and new caste. Those who have been born into a family of one of the castes of Krishnapur are believed to have been brought to their lot by karma, of their own making, that justifies their rank in the village society.

Some Hindu writers conceive of karma as an energy that becomes external to the doer, hanging over one's head like a thundercloud.Without warning, like a thunderbolt out of the blue, karma descends upon the doer to effect its perfect retribution. Other Hindu thinkers describe karma as a force within the doer that operates via the conditioning of one's disposition and drives, causing those who are in wrong paths to persist in them until they are ruined by natural processes. In a somewhat similar line others have conceived of karma as a deposit of exceedingly fine material stuffs that make up a sheath—the *karanasarira,* or causal body—that surrounds our soul. Each separate element in the sheath imparts to us a particular mental or emotional trait that entails a kind of retribution that we must eventually experience.

According to *The Laws of Manu* (12:34-51), our actions alter the balance of the three strands (*gunas*) of our material makeup. Moral actions increase the dominance of *sattva*, the good strand, and less worthy actions increase the place of *rajas* and *tamas*, the less favorable strands. Shifts in the balance of the strands that are brought about in us by our acts bring changes also, for better or worse, in our emotional and moral tendencies, increasing the likelihood that past moral behavior will be repeated in the future. But even in the case of the wrongdoer, deterioration is not

inevitable; by will power, we can resist and correct our evil tendencies. The only inevitability is that we shall undergo the just consequences of the good and evil deeds that we have already done.

Hindus who believe in one God add to such impersonal concepts the belief that good and evil acts bring their proper rewards because of God's knowledge of them. Remembering our deeds with pleasure or displeasure, God sends us at rebirth into appropriate new lives of higher opportunity or further discipline.

The Hindu belief in rebirth according to karma has convinced the people of Krishnapur that their places in society are appropriate and advantageous. Each villager is understood to have a long personal history of good and and evil deeds done in former lives, and each one's present situation is seen as not only just, but also as that person's best opportunity for personal betterment. But because of their past deeds and their effects, people are fit only for the particular grade of freedom and resonsibility offered by their present caste and sex. To attempt to take on the duties of another social station would be not only unjust but also dangerous, since it would lead to poor performance and even more restricted rebirths in the future. The Bhagavadgita warns:

*Better one's own duty, poorly done,*

*Than the duty of another, well-performed.*

*Doing the work natural to one's self,*

*One incurs no guilt. (18.47)*

Through such explanations, classical Hinduism has won general acceptance of the caste system's strict controls and has made its culture a lasting one.

**The Cosmology of Krishnapur**

The horizon of the villagers extends far beyond the boundaries of Krishnapur and far beyond the visible world. The geography about which they are most concerned is not horizontal but vertical, for they inhabit a universe conceived as ladderlike in structure and

almost infinite in its heights and depths. They contemplate the possibility of residence, after death, in levels of the universe far beyond the highest and lowest ranks of their village society. The vedic faith in svarga has evolved into belief in many heavens and hells in which exceptionally virtuous or vicious persons will experience the agony or bliss that is their due.

*The Laws of Manu* (12.40 ff., 4.87-90) states that those whose bad behavior during life was dominated in various degrees by the strand of darkness (tamas) will receive appropriate treatment at rebirth. The less base are reborn as the nobler animals— elephants, horses, lions, tigers, and boars. The worse are reborn as lesser animals—tortoises, fishes, snakes, lizards, and spiders. Stealers of meat become vultures, and thieves of grain are reborn as rats. Other sinners may come back as grasses, shrubs and creepers, or in immobile states. The very sinful are condemned by Yama, the judge of the dead, to dreadful hells where they are scorched in hot sand, boiled in jars, or devoured by ravens. Manu mentions twenty-one hells, one below the other, through each of which the wicked must work their way upward.

Above the human world there are pleasant celestial realms where meritorious beings dwell, some as the superhuman *gandharvas* and *apsarases*, the musicians of the gods. Above them are the luminous abodes of the sages and ancestors, the various heavens of the ordinary gods, and finally *Bramaloka*, the heaven of Brahma the Creator, which Hindus who believe in many deities think of as the highest heaven.

The later Puranas elaborate the picture of these afterworlds with endless detail, but with little consistency or authority. Popular Hinduism is united only in a general conviction that the processes of moral retribution are vast in extent and very thorough.

## The Ceremonial Duties of Classical Hinduism

In the postvedic age new rituals were devised that have proved to be exceedingly durable. They may be looked upon as the counterpart in ritual of the new economic and social observances that survive in Krishnapur.

**The Continuing Tradition of the Srauta Rites**

Although the srauta sacrifices diminished in popularity during the sutra age, they never entirely lost their following. A few priests have continued to perform them, and a few scholars have continued to study the problems of performing them correctly. The discipline of these scholars of the ritual is called *Karma-mimamsa,* which means the "investigation of [vedic ritual] acts." Between A.D.200 and 1600 comprehensive works on these matters were composed by Jaimini, Prabhakara, Kumarila Bhatta, Apadeva, and Laugakshi Bhaskara. The scholars of this school who studied the Vedas intensely for their own special purposes became the recognized Hindu experts in the interpretation of the Vedas for any purpose, and finally the authorities on correct methods in the study of all Hindu sacred texts. In these wider capacities they laid down some of the foundational principles of orthodox Hinduism.

Scholars of the karma-mimamsa school established the orthodox position on the nature of revelation in Hindu scriptures. As atheists, they could not understand the Vedas to be commands uttered by any God or gods; yet they did consider those scriptures to be a Word of superhuman origin, a self-existent divine Sound that reverberates eternally in the celestial realms. At the beginning of each new eon, as the world emerges again from cosmic dissolution, certain great sages hear that Word and utter it, thus introducing the Vedas again into the stream of human religious knowledge. As scriptures thus heard by the sages, the Vedas are called sruti-the "heard"or the "revealed"—and are tghe highest form of scripture. Because of their unique divine origin, they are infallibly true in every word.

One might expect that this insistence on the verbal authority of the Vedas would make Hinduism a fundamentalist religion, rigid in its creeds and ethical codes. But in fact Hinduism is tolerant of a wide variety of beliefs and teachings. The theorists of the karma-mimamsa school took the position that the revealed scriptures had to be restated periodically by human sages in the language and terminology of postvedic times. In every cosmic age they say, the message of the Vedas must be recast in mediating

scriptures called *smritis*, which adapt the eternal teaching to the poorer capacities of humanity of the later ages. The religious writings of the smriti class, as humand compositious, are not of unchallengeable authority. But they are revered as the works of ancient wise men who were learned in the Vedas. This karma-mimamsa teaching explains the Hindu respect for newer writings like the dharmasastras and the Bhagavadgita.

Another emancipating principle of the karma-mimamsa scholars is their theory of scripture interpretation. It is called the principle of the *mahavakyam* (the major statement). This means that when a scripture seems to contain contradictions and its teaching is unclear, puzzled students must first find the statement expressing the scripture's central message. According to the karma-mimamsa scholars, the organizing theme of the Vedas and the Upanishads (which they regarded as part of the vedic literature) was the command to perform sacrifices. Portions of the Vedas and the Upanishads that appeared to have some other purpose, such as answering philosophical questions, had the actual function of preparing minds for the intelligent performance of the sacrifices. They saw such a supportive purpose also in the mythological passages of the Vedas. But Hindus of subsequent times whose interests have been utterly different from those of these ritualists have been free to perceive the heart of the Vedas in other passages of mystical or ethical or other import. This principle has often helped Hindus explain perplexing texts. More important, it has permitted Hindu thought ot develop in any direction so long as a starting point can be found in the heritage of the past.

**The Domestic Ceremonies of Classical Hinduism**

Soon after the sutra style of composition had been developed, vedic guilds used this convenient literary form to record the approved ritual practices of the Aryan home in works called *Grihya Sutras* (sutras on the domestic rituals). Even today the brahmans of Krishnapur who perform these ceremonies or instruct laypersons in how to perform them use modern compositions that cite the *Grihya Sutras*. The modern manuals use ancient scriptures selectively along with amplifications introduced by commentators over many

centuries. We shall describe some of the ancient domestic rites that are still in use today.

**The Sandyhas** (*Meditations of the Twilights*) The sandyhas are personal meditations designed to be performed at the important transitional hours in the sun's daily passage—dawn, noon, and evening. The dawn meditation still survives among devout high-caste Hindus, who rise for this purpose in the first light. After bathing, cleaning the teeth, sipping water, and applying to the forehead the cosmetic mark (*tilaka*) of their sect, they spend a few moments in formal breathing exercises (*pranayama*). Just before the rim of the sun appears on the horizon, the worshiper stands and recites, until the sun actually rises, the lines of Rigveda 3.62.10:

*Let us meditate upon that excellent glory*

*Of the divine vivifying Sun;*

*May He enlighten*

*Our undrstanding*

In the final moment of the rite he pours out from his joined palms an offering of water to the Sun.

**The Pancamahayajna** (*The Five Great Sacrifices*). Each family is asked by tradition to perform, through one of its members, daily rites in honor of five kinds of beings: the gods, the spirits, the ancestors of the family, humanity in general, and Brahman (that is, the Vedas). As prayers and bits of food are offered, worshipers are to mind their duty to revere all these venerable realities.

**The Samskaras** (*Rites of the Rounds of Life*). The samskaras mark the important transitions in the lives of Hindus of the three highest castes, from the moment of conception to death. They enable families to surround their members with affection and to try to protect them from harm at times of change. These rituals are performed in the home, usually near the family hearth. Even funeral observances, which reach their climax at the cremation site, begin and end at the home. Brahmans are usually called in to perform the most important of these rites today, but the father and the mother are the primary actors in these performances, and the

father himself may officiate at them if he knows how. Apart from funerals, almost all these observances are happy occasions marked by a joyous gathering of relatives.

Today many of the ancient rites have dropped out of use. But the traditional marriage and funeral ceremonies are still part of every Hindu's career, and most of the other samskaras are still practiced by a minority of high-caste families. (A description of the main samskaras is provided in the box on the following pages.)

*On the banks of the Ganges River near*

*Banaras, a worshiper performs a*

*sandhya, a personal meditation*

*conducted at dawn, noon, or evening by high-caste Hindus. Kit Kittle.*

**The Puja** (*Ritual of Image Worship*). The most frequently performed of all Hindu ceremonies is a form of ritual worship called puja, which is addressed to an image of a deity. In the postvedic age, as dissatisfaction with the vedic sacrifices increased, puja took the place of the costly vedic yajna as the most common approach to the Aryan gods. The use of idols-puja's main innovation-is of uncertain origin. Images made of perishable materials appear to have been worshiped in shrines in the time of the *Grihya Sutras*, and images of stone surviving from the second century B.C. are firm evidence of the prevalence of the new ritual at that time. In vedic times the gods were thought of as beings living on high, who might be induced to come down to visit human beings for a short time as guests at sacrifices. The innovation of which we speak arose in connection with a belief that the celestial deities, if properly approached, could be induced to adopt earthly residences and thus become more permanently available to their worshipers.

To enable a particular celestial being to descend and remain on earth, first a sculptor has to create a form displaying the known features of the deity. Then, in a special rite usually called *Pranasamsthapana* (establishing the vital breath), a skillful priest must invite the god or goddess to descend into the image. By

means of the rite of installation an image becomes a special locus of the divinity and a place where worshipers have easy access to the god. As long as the descended gods are cared for and honored, they are believed to remain on earth. But they cannot be neglected: They must be given personal care and be entertained with offerings of food and drink. The provision of these necessities through a daily routine of rituals is the basic activity in puja. If the services are not given or if the image is not protected from the weather and from affronts, the deity will abandon the image.

In puja as in the vedic sacrifice the object of worship is a single deity or at most a pair, and the worship is not that of a congregation, but of an individual offering worship for personal reasons or for the benefit of a household. The types of gain sought in the earliest puja that we know about were the same as those pursued in the older yajna: health, wealth, safety, and blessed afterlives in heavenly places. But in accordance with the new cosmology, the desire to accumulate good karma was soon added.

One of the most common sites of puja is the shrine of a private home. At least once a day the image, which is kept in a niche or cabinet, must be accorded the proper rites. In wealthy homes the performer may be a brahman who is a professional chaplain, but in ordinary households a member of the family performs the function. Near the image are stored certain utensils: a vessel for water with a ladle for purifying the area with sprinklings, a bell, an open oil lamp or incense burner to be rotated before the image, and trays on which flowers, fruit, cakes, or cooked meals may be offered. In the morning the deity is roused form sleep, bathed, dressed, perfumed, wreathed with flowers, and offered breakfast. At midday a meal of hot cooked food may be offered. In the evening, supper is set before the deity, an evening song is sung, and a courteous goodnight wish is expressed.

## The Hindu Temple and Its Rituals

The most exalted setting for puja is the public temple. For two thousand years the creation of temples and the image housed in them has been the principal outlet of Hindu artists. The great temples of India are so ornate that their fundamental plan is not

easy to perceive. At the heart of a Hindu temple is a small, rectangular, windowless cell called the *garbhagriha* (inner or womb house). This cell houses the image of the deity of the temple and is its holiest spot. Entrance to the cell is by a single door whose threshold is crossed by few except the *pujaris* (professional priests) who attend the image. There is no pulpit, no preaching, and group worship is rare. Visitors wishing to make reverential circumambulations of the deity may do so by walking around the outer walls of the cell.

The second architectural feature of the Hindu temple is its *vimana*, or spire. Usually roundish, the vimana caps the central cell and suggests by its circularity and elevation that the sky is the true abode of the deity who now dwells temporarily beneath it. A third architectural element is the temple's porch (*mandapa*). This porch may be nothing more than a small stoop to protect the doorway of the cell from the sun and rain, but it may be expanded to include standing space for visiting worshipers who come to salute the deity or to watch reverently while priests present offerings on the worshipers' behalf. At those centres of pilgrimage where there are many visitors, the mandapas become waiting rooms and audience halls much larger than the garbhagrihas.

At such great shrines there are also musicians who give concerts in the mandapa for the enjoyment of the deity and the worshipers. Here the mythological exploits of the god are told in song, recitation, or pantomimes performed by dancers. At certain times of the day, the garbhagriha with its image is opened to the view of all visitors who have come to enjoy the blessing of darsana, or sight of the deity, or to offer their salutations and gifts and petitions. Other times are reserved for the god's or goddess's nap, or for "strolls" when the priests carry a small duplicate of the main image through the temple courtyard or streets.

The construction of a temple is sponsored by a single donor of great wealth, who is thought to generate very great and lasting merit by such an act. Temples remain under the control of their builders and their heirs or trustees, who have the right to appoint the head priest (*mahant*)and his staff and to receive the offerings of

worshipers; but temples are public institutions in the fact that any Hindu may enter and worship there. Unlike vedic worship, participation in temple worship has always been open to sudras, and since India became independent, this privilege has been extended by law to outcastes as well. But in other respects the temples do not express the collective Hindu life. As a rule, they are built by individuals, not congregations, and worship in them is the worship of individuals.

Puja is understood in many ways, and it is performed for many purposes, self-interested and self-sacrificing. Some seek earthly favors through the deities' goodwill, which has been won through human gifts. Others seek, by the merit of their worship, to attain after death a more fortunate rebirth on earth or in blessed realms above. When in postvedic times a longing arose for enternal liberation from rebirths, puja became a form of expression also for salvation-seeking persons. Those who hoped for liberation through the power of a personal God found in puja a means for expressing their devotion and sense of dependence. Hindu monists of the Advaita school do not hope for salvation through the worship of God or of gods, nor do they believe images to be true representations of the impersonal and all-inclusive Divine Reality but they too have often frequented temples, seeking mental discipline in conforming to their rituals and seeing hints of the unity between self and universe in correspondences between the form of the worshiper, of the temple, and of the overarching sky above it.

**Rites of the Village Godlings**

In rural India another ritual tradition survives. The deities involved are minor beings unknown to Sanskrit literature, and therefore our information comes from observing Hindu life. Travelers approaching a typical Hindu village on the plains of northern India may see beside a well a pile of stones daubed with red paint. Elsewhere along country path there may be a conical mound of earth into which a red pennant has been thrust, and fragments of coconut shell nearby imdicate that the village people sense an unseen presence there that requires offerings. In central and

southern India adobe cells are found, containing mud figurines. They are shrines of local godlings who must be worshiped in their own humble abodes.

These godlings are thought of by many village people as destructive natural forces that from time to time disrupt of security of village life. Human afflictions of unknown cause are believed to be the work of such local spirits who have been offended. When there is a calamity in a community because of the offenses of careless persons, someone with shamanistic gifts must be found to make contact with the irritated spirit. After the identity of the spirit and the cause of his or her anger are discovered, the villagers are told what rites and offerings must be made to appease the vengeful deity.

Many of these spirits are believed to be female. The most powerful fall into two major classes: the goddesses who protect particular villages, and the "mothers" who inflict particular diseases, blights, and other kinds of harm. The rites addressed to the village godlings are pujas in general outline, but they belong to another tradition and differ from all the puja rituals described so far. The officiating priest is not a brahman but a low-caste person, often the local washerman or toilet cleaner. The liturgical language is not Sanskrit but the local vernacular, and most of the sacrificial offerings consist of materials loathed by brahmans. The animal victim are often of species never used in vedic sacrifice, such as chickens or pigs, which are believed by the orthodox to be unclean. Deliberate cruelties are sometimes inflicted on these animals (in fact, the human participants sometimes inflict agonies on themselves) in an apparent effort to satisfy the demands of the goddesses through sufferings less grave than the loss of human life. The aim of such rites is solely to avert dangers; no notion of salvation is involved, or even of generating merit.

It may be tempting to identify these rituals with magic rather than with religion, but the rites are religious in nature to the extent that superhuman beings are addressed by ritual. Another factor is present that is often considered to be a characteristic of religion; social concern. In the worship of these deities, the usual

individualism of Hindu religious activity is set aside in collective action to meet a common crisis, and local populations are drawn together in a rare unity. During the short span of these gory performances, the fragmented Hindu village becomes a community in the fullest sense of the term. Thus although these cults are often called forms of "lower Hinduism," in one respect their achievement is high. Today, however, this village religion is on the wane, giving way to the more effective remedies of modern science.

**The Place of Religious Practice in Hinduism**

Hindus' religious duties, as we have seen, fall into two classes: ritual obligations and social or moral obligations. Hindus do not regard the distinction between moral and ritual duties as important; their aim is simply to fulfill the requirements of dharma, a term that covers all the acts required by tradition. All the duties described in this chapter, whether ritual or social, are alike in that they are viewed as the direct or indirect requirements of the holy Vedas. The householder's offerings of water to his ancestors. The morning worship of a wife at her domestic shrine, the activity of a king in defending his realm, and the work of a potter in shaping his clay all are sacred duties, all produce merit or demerit, and all determine the future of the doer, for good or ill.

In vedic times Hindus believed that, through the pleasure of the gods, the observance of the traditional duties would surely lead to an immortal life in the heaven of their ancestors. But Hindus in postvedic times conceived the process of reward more mechanically, in terms of the accumulation of karma, and concluded that eternal blessedness could not be earned by good deeds, however many and however great. The good karma produced by one's deeds will remain finite in quantity, no matter how long the life of virtue is continued. Final liberation is infinite in length and infinite in worth, and in a just universe, one's merit, which is always finite, cannot deserve or attain this infinite reward. Those who embrace the concept of retribution inherent in the doctrine of karma have been forced to conclude that good actions alone cannot bring final salvation from the round of briths and deaths. At most, good actions can lead to blessings in this life and,

in future lives, to long existences in elevated and happy worlds. Thus Hindus joined thinkers of many other religious who have held that salvation cannot be obtained by good works alone.

Desolated by this loss of hope, Hindus in postvedic times groped for new paths to a life beyond all deaths . In time they established their classical plans of salvation: the Way of Knowledge (*jnanamarga*) and the Way of Devotion (*bhaktimarga*). Those seeking eternal beatitude shifted their hope from the life of religious duty to one of these new paths. After the Way of Knowledge and the Way of Devotion were recognized as divisions of Hindu life, the older discipline of the customary duties was also thought of as a marga—the *Karmamarga*, or Way of Action. It is the Hinduism of the Way of Action that we have been examining until now.

The conception of the three margas is one of the favorite Hindu formulas for identifying the distinctive forms of Hindu religious life. We shall use its categories to outline the subject matter of the next two chapters. In using the idea of the three margas we should not suppose, however, that all three ways begin at the same point, or lead to the same destination. All Hindus are born into the pattern of customary living that makes up the karmamarga, and all travel on this way in their early years. Ideally, they become aware in time that the karmamarga does not end in salvation but in rebirth, and they consider taking up one of the two paths that do promise salvation.

These personal transitions from the way of duties to a way of salvation are often gradual and hidden: The status of a person is not easy to discern. It is not possible to divide all Hindu clearly into three definite groups according to marga. Most Hindus, moreover, participate in two of them. Millions continue to perform faithfully all the duties of the karmamarga; yet they have make a strong commitment also to one of the two ways of salvation and have begun to cultivate its disciplines. And in the understanding of the Way of Devotion, the requirements for liberation can be met while remaining completely faithful to all the duties of the Way of Action. The concept of the three margas is more useful in

distinguishing types of Hinduism than in separating individual Hindus into types.

**Classical Hinduism: Way of Knowledge**

The understanding that knowledge gives power is common to many religious traditions. Hindus who follow the Way of Knowledge (jnanamarga) seek an exceptional kind of knowledge, to solve an unusal problem. They observe that ordinary factual knowledge of the things of this world provides no access to eternal life, but only to things that change. The Hindu sage therefore seeks to transcend the knowledge of phenomenal things and achieve a mystical knowledge of reality as a whole, that will yield mastery over all things, and thus mastery also over the deepest problem of life. As the *Markandeya Purana* explains it:

One who thirsts for knowledge thinking "This should be known! This should be known!" does not attain to knowledge even within a thousand *kalpas* [cosmic ages].... He shold seek to acquire that knowledge which is the essence of all, and the instrument of the accomplishment of all objects.

**Esoteric Knowledge in the Vedic Age**

By the end of the vedic period the priests of the vedic rituals no longer conceived of the gods as personal beings who granted favors in response to offerings. They had come to believe that the effectiveness of the vedic sacrifices sprang from their own perception in the rituals of occult extensions of important cosmic powers. They believed it was by their manipulation of these secret presences that the boons were obtained that had been thought of as gifts of the gods. In its continuing development, this tendency took two directions.

1 *The priests searched for keys that would unlock wider and wider aspects of the universe.* They were fascinated particularly with the possibility that a particular key, if found, might give access to the reality underlying the entire world. This quest for a single essence behind the diversity of the world was not only a philosophical inquiry, but also part of the struggle of a troubled age for exceptional powers for handling difficulties that were grave and

deep.

2 *In the quest for control of the universe, the priests turned form the symbolic shapes of the fire pits and the esoteric meanings assigned to the external offerings and considered the possible cosmic connections of aspects of the sacrificers themselves.* The powerful liturgical words of the performing priests, the breath with which they were uttered, and the mental conceptions from which they sprang had obvious connections with the outter world. Powers of the most comprehensive sort might be within the grasp of reciting priests who were aware of these correspondences. Fancies regarding a universal control centered particularly upon the term Brahman, which then meant the aggregate of all the Vedas' holy words. These sacred words, severally and collectively, were in the possession of the priests. If knowledge of single words gave single powers, why would not knowledge of Brahman, the collective word, give access to a total cosmic power and to the solution of the most widespread and desperate human problems?

Once the keys to power were seen as contained in the priests themselves rather than in their rituals, it was no longer essential that the rituals be performed. Meditation by the priests on their own inward being might be as effective as the performance of outward rites. As a result of such thinking, the practice of sacrifice declined and the practice of meditation increased. The spread of the new doctrine of karma further discouraged sacrifice, since ritual acts, always of finite number and therefore of strictly measured effectiveness, were now seen as unable to bring about the infinite blessing of immortality. On the other hand, knowledge was considered to be measureless, like thought, and thus infinite in its possible outreach. Even total reality could have knowledge as its earthly correspondence. Best of all knowledge can be acquired, and its great power can be controlled by disciplined meditation.

Some ritualists of the late vedic age turned for power to esoteric knowledge while continuing to seek the same material gains that were the goal of the old sacrifice. But it was the seekers of the lost vedic immortality who most needed the power of secret knowledge, and they made knowledge their distinctive quest. When

they abandoned ritual to pursue eternal life by means of meditation. Aryan religion developed an important new form, and the Way of Knowledge was born. It came into full expression in compositions called the Upanishads, which are the fundamental scriptures of the Way of Knowledge.

## The Upanishads

The word upanishad means a secret teaching. The Upanishads are "secrets" in that they tell of realities not superficially apparent and express truths intended to be studied only by inquirers of special fitness. More than a hundred Hindu mystical writings of many ages are called Upanishads, but only thirteen of these are accepted by all Hindus as sruti, or revealed scripture of the highest authority. These thirteen Upanishads, the oldest have to equal in importance in the formation of Hindu thought.

Almost all the metaphysical ideas and meditative disciplines of classical Hinduism have some root in the Upanishads and base their claim to authority on that connection. Hindus' reverence for the Upanishads rests on belief that they were revealed in the same manner as the vedic hymns and the Brahmanas. The Upanishads are regarded as part of the Veda, and followers of the Way of Knowledge understand them to contain the final and full teaching of the sages who articulated the vedic revelation. Most Hindus have derived them from their impression of what the Vedas teach. In fact, the Upanishads are the most ancient books that can be understood with ease by educated Hindus. Written in classical Sanskrit, these newer scriptures were the product of the new caste society. They offer solutions to problems that have troubled members of that classical Hindu culture ever since its formation.

Although the Upanishads are not dated and their authors are not known, it is clear that those who composed them known and used the vedic hymns the Brahmanas, and the Aranyakas, and it is generally believed that they began to appear about 600 B.C. The formation of the major Upanishads continued through several stages, first in prose and the in verse, probably ending about 200 B.C. The Upanishads were composed, then in the same period were the *Srauta Sutras*, the *Grihya Sutras*, and the *dharmasutras*. Their

authors had interests that were very different from those of the authors of those sutras, however.

**The Authors of the New Teaching**

The creators of this new teaching were upper-class Aryans who had been stirred by glimpses of a blessedness more desirable than the favors promised by the vedic cult. It was an age of daring new thought and free debate. The new thinking met with the old in various settings. Sometimes the background was a royal court, where the king presided over doctrinal discussions. At other times it was an assembly of brahmans or warriors before whom famous sages debated. The scene, again, was a teacher's home where teacher or student interrupted the traditional lesson plan with new questions or surprising answers, or the setting was a family discussion during which a father or his son presented startling new ideas.

The most famous teachers of the new outlook, however, were wanderers who made rare appearances in throne rooms or assembly halls to proclaim their message but departed soon for their usual habitations in the forest. All who were deeply moved by their message were expected to leave their homes to take up the hermit's life and live on alms. The interest in the forest solitude life did not centre on the practice of asceticism, but rather on the attainment of control over one's destiny by the power of knowledge.

**Proclamation of Brahman**

The great theme of these teachers was a proclamation centering on the powerful word Brahman, which had now been given and even larger meaning. In late vedic religion the word Brahman referred not only to the recited words of the Veda, but also to the mysterious power that was felt to be present in the uttering of the vedic hymns. It was believed to be a connecting force flowing between the liturgy and the natural world, the medium through which the ritual exerted its influence upon events outside the theater of the sacrifice. The idea of Brahman as the essence of all things was not absent, but the principal vedic search was for power to move any and every part of the universe through ritual.

The authors of the Upanishads continued to conceive the Brahman dynamically, as a hidden power latent in all things, a sacred power that controls the whole world. The third chapter of the Kena Upanishad relates how even the greatest of the vedic gods were forced to admit that they had no power aside from their share in the power of the mysterious Brahman dwelling in them. Brahman in the Upanishads is the successor of the vedic gods as the highest and holiest Reality of religion. But this Brahman is more than a sacred power; it is the source from which all things spring; the tie that holds all things together, and the That that all things are Brahman is not only the power but also the very essence of the vedic gods. Asked how many gods there are, the sage Yajnavalkya reduced the traditional number to thirty-three, then to three, and finally to Brahman, one and one alone (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 3.9.1-10).

If Brahman is the basis of all things from the greatest of the gods to a drop of water, it followed that it was the fundamental reality of one's own self. This final turn of interpretation was not added casually for the sake of formal completeness only; it was an extension that had personal significance. In Chandogya Upanishad 6.8-16, the sage Uddalaka Aruni taught his son Svetaketu about the invisible reality that is the essence of all that exists. At the end of each phase of this indoctrination, he repeated thee famous refrain that is the heart of his message; "That is Reality, That is the self (atman), That are you, O Svetaketu!" Nine repetitions of this phrase, coming at the climax of each of the nine chapters of this document, emphasize an identification central to the Upanishads. In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad it takes the form of the famous credo "I am the Brahman" (1.4.10).

**The Anxiety at the Root of the Upanishads**

What led the sages of the Upanishads into the investigations that produced this distinctive view of life? Robert E. Hume, a respected translator of the Upanishads, believes that the authors were moved by philosophical curiosity. He points out that when a culture has attained a certain stage of mental development, it must undertake "to construe the world of experience as a rational whole." For him the Upanishads are "the first recorded attempts of the Hindus at

systematic philosophizing."

Indeed, the proposals in some of the Upanishads that all things originated in water, space, air ether, the sun, or a void do remind us of similar speculations by the pre-Socratic philosophers of Greece, who were active at about this same time. The Upanishad, however, do not seek to answer life's questions by philosophical reasoning alone. Katha Upanishad 2.23 and 6.10, for example, holds that Reality cannot be known "by instruction, nor by intellect, nor by much learning," for truth can be realized only "when cease the five Sense-knowledges, together with the mind, and the intellect stirs not...". Thus the authors of the Upanishads, despite their occasional sharp use of reasoning, were in fact mystics rather than philosophers. By stimulating imagination and intuition, they attempted to stir to life a latent capacity for vision. They were world renouncers, driven by hungers seated deeper in the emotions than the intellectual needs of the academic philosophers.

Some scholars have tried to apply the Western model of the Protestant Reformation. They have regarded the Upanishads as the outcome of a double rebellion—a rebellion of a free religion of personal experience against the formal feligion of priestly rituals, and a revolt of ksatriya religious thinkers against a brahman monopoly of religious leadership. Those who see an overturn of leadership in the Upanishads point to the prominence, among the teachers of the new outlook, of such ksatriyas as Ajatasatru, the king of Banaras (mentioned in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad) and King Asvapati Kaikeya (mentioned in the Chandogya Upanishad). Both princes are said to have had brahmans among their pupils. An attack on priestly arrogance in the Mundaka Upanishad, where the sacrifices are called leaky boats in which travelers sink to their deaths, has been used in support of this view of the Upanishads as an expression of a revolt against the dominance of brahmans.

The composition of the Upanishads did entail a revolution in religion, but careful scholarship has corrected the impression that the Upanishads are the work of enemies of the brahman class. The Upanishads do not denounce as lies the promises of the priests of the older cult; in fact, most of the leaders of the new religions were

themselves brahmans. The Upanishads were preserved by brahmans. The Upanishads acknowledge that the priests' sacrifices produce the benefits promised. What they deny is that the gains obtained are of any real worth. If there was a revolt against brahmans here, it was a revolt led by other brahmans adhering to new values. It was a reform movement within the traditional religious leadership of the Āryans, refreshed by the participation of ksatriyas and by the acceptance of some of their ideas. It did not represent the concerns of a new class of leadersn but rather the concerns of a new age.

The acute concern was death, viewed now with a special horror created by the new ideas of karma, rebirth, and caste. The death that the authors of the Upanishads dreaded was not annihilation but a decline and collapse that was only the next in a repulsive series of lives and deaths devoid of interest and without end. They saw themselves as entrapped in samsara, doomed to a wearying round of worldly lives in the cramping roles of the new postvedic society. The Way of Action no longer offered them the hope of a lasting happiness even in heaven. Their great desire was mukti or moksa, liberation from the bonds of karma. What they longed for was not more lives. They were already all too sure that there would be more liver. Rather, they sought freedom in a stable, unchanging existence of another nature, free from all necessity of death and birth. The solution to this problem came with the discovery of a secret bridge between the human soul and an immortal Spirit in the outer universe. The discovery was achieved in a religious quest that used the traditional Indian method of searching for correspondences.

### The Double Quest for the Eternal

One side of the search for something eternal was the probing of the outer universe for a possible lasting essence. Various Upanishads began the search by surmising that the visible universe originated with earth, air, water, or space as the primeval stuff. These speculations came to naught however, and the sages found deeper insight in Rigveda 10.129's mysterious affirmation of "That One" laying in the waters of nonbeing, that became the single source of

all that breathes. The Upanishads gave this source the name of Brahman. Brahman is one throughout the universe, and it makes the universe one. Chandogya Upanishad 6.2.1 calls it "One only without a second." In the homogeneity or Brahman, the distressing changes of life can end completely. Those who find their existence in Brahman are immune from the unwelcome transformations of death and rebirth.

The composers of the Upanishads ventured several major statements about the nature of the world-essence. First, that Brahman is spirit—that is, it is not a material thing. As the unifier of material things, it must be an essence of a superior, nonphenomenal order that the eye cannot see. The sixth book of the Chandogya Upanishad relates that the boy Svetaketu had never heard of the world-soul and doubted the actual presence of a spirit that could not be seen. To explain this phenomenon, his father Uddalaka gave him a lump of salt to drop into a cup of water. Svetaketu did so and set the cup aside for a time. Later Uddalaka asked his son to give back to him the lump of salt. The boy felt around in the cup without finding the lump and declared that the salt was not there. Instructed by his father, Svetaketu then took several sips of the salty water from the cup and admitted that the salt, although nonexistent to touch and sight, was indeed in every part of the water. The lesson is that a reality can be present that the senses do not reveal, and the supposition that two things cannot occupy the same space at the same time does not rule out the eoexistence of two realities belonging to different orders of being. Thus the fine essence called Brahman is present throughout the universe, even though all five senses fail to detect it. Through the sensitivity of the mystic its presence can be revealed.

A second great affirmation is that Brahman is generative—not a dead thing but the source of the world and all its life. Again Svetaketu did not understand and his father explained by means of another demonstration. The two were standing under a banyan tree, the most widely spreading of all Indian trees. The son was told to pluck a seedpod from a branch, to open the pod, and then to crack open one of the small seeds. "What do you see there?" asked Uddalaka. "Nothing at all, sir!" Svetaketu replied. (The seed of the

banyan is small, hollow, and seemingly empty.) Uddalaka then made his point: From a hollow shell with "nothing" in it, the mighty banyan tree had grown, its invisible kernel the very germ of life. And so it was with the great world tree: It had risen from an empirical nothing, from a nonphenomenal Spirit that the ignorant denied. Yet this invisible presence was a vital force that had changed itself into the endless complexites of phenomenal existence and sustained them with its life.

Brahman is indescribable. It is invisible to the eye, so how can it be characterized by adjectives relating to color or form? Beyond hearing, touch, taste, and smell as well, Brahman is beyond the power of all descriptive speech. The Tattiriya Upanishad says that we may know the bliss of Brahman, but as for knowing Brahman itself, both our words and our minds are ineffective (2.4.1). Thus in their quest for the final basis of the external universe, the sages of the Upanishads discovered an immaterial life giving Oneness that is beyond description.

**The Quest For a Changeless Self**

As keenly as the Hindu thinkers searched the outer universe for Brahman, the Reality beyond the sun, they also explored the inner world. Asking, "What is the real person." They noted in detail the processes of birth, growth, decline, and death, seeking as lasting essence of the human individual: Some thought it lay in a tiny inner person, a soul the size of a thumb, that is the model from which we are reconstituted again and again for new lives. Others sought it in the old vedic concept of the prana, or life breath. Although the scrutinizing ot the body that one finds in some Upanishads could be mistaken for research in anatomy, the real concern was immortality. All such attempts to find an immortal essence by external sorutiny of persons came to naught.

Finding nothing exempt from death in the material body, the sages turned to method that proved more fruitful: a search of the psyche for nonphenomenal constituents of the human being that might be revealed by introspection. Indian thinkers have regarded the findings of inner experience as just as valid as (or perhaps more valid than) the data of objective observation. Beginning in the

Upanishads, the Hindu investigations of the self have produced views that the real self, or atman, is a nonphysical, inner presence concealed by encircling sheaths.

The array of constituents around one's true core can be visualized as a pattern of concentric shells through which one must probe to reach one's true being or self. Three such models of the human structure are traditional and have their beginning in the Upanishads. Although never brought into careful relation with each other in a single system, they all illustrate the special tendency of Hindu thinking about the person. We shall place these partial explanations of the self side by side, like three targets used in archery.

1. *The human self veiled by material stuffs.* According to this concept, the real self is hidden behind the concentric sheaths of three "bodies" of increasingly refined materiality. The outmost layer is our gross, visible body, the *sthula sarira.* This body is an aggregation of five kinds of gross elements called *mahabhutas,* which are made up of smaller units called *tanmatras,* which are also of five kinds. Each mahabhuta contains one, two, or up to five tanmatras, each of which functions as the stimulator of one of the five human senses; the presence of a given tanmatra in a mahabhuta causes it to activate a given human sense. The fact that the tanmatra of taste, for example, is present in the mahabhuta of water is what makes it possible for us to taste water. (Our ability also to see, feel, hear, and smell things depends likewise upon the presence of the tanmatras of color, touch, sound, and odor.)

At death this outermost shell of the gross body is sloughed off, and at rebirth another such gross body is acquired. During death the personal and physical characteristics of the individual are preserved in a second shell, a subtle body that is the next inward from the gross body. It is in this body that deceased persons must undergo retribution in the heavens and hells. Subtle bodies are composed of the five tanmatras only, which are not perceptible to the senses. Only rarely a person of super normal sensitivity perceives the ghostly presence of a dead person having only a subtle body.

Inward from our subtle body is our *causal body*, consisting of the aggregate of our karma. At the end of the cosmic age (*kalpa*), when the entire world devolves into the primary material stuff and the subtle bodies too are dissolved, only our causal body continues to ensheath our essential self and to preserve the record of our distinctive moral history. At the beginning of each new cosmic age, our individuality is reconstituted from the karma contained in our causal bodies, and we resume our careers in positions that are in agreement with our karma. Only in final liberation will the causal body also dissolve and then the history of retribution will stop. Then there will be left only our inmost self, the one ensheathed by all these bodies, a being with no bodily nature at all. This is our atman, or true self.

2. *The human self veiled by psychic organs.* According to this concept, the outermost circle that concerns us is an external ring of sense objects, the frame of material things lying just beyond the outermost boundaries or the self. Just inside this frame lies the grossest layer of an individual's psychical equipment, which consists of the ten faculties (*indriyas*). Five of these are the faculties for action (*karma indriyas*): grasping, moving, speaking, evereting, and procreating. The other five faculties are for knowing (jnana indriyas): seeing hearing smelling, tasting, and feeling. Directed outward through our five sense organs, the faculties of knowing explore the objects of the surrounding world and report on the nature of these objects to the inner faculties of our psyche.

Moving inward, the next of these faculties is the automatic mind, or *manas*. Our automatic mind identifies the objects reported to it by the five faculties of knowing. The manas, which is incapable of reflection or decision, merely transmits its recognitions to the *buddhi*, a free psychic faculty of thought, decision, and command. Buddhi is generally translated as "intellect,"even though that English word does not cover all the meanings of this term. The buddhi is the seat and source of our own consciousness, but it is not the source of consciousness itself. That capacity dwells in the innermost reality of our psychic makeup, which lies at the centre of this circle. Consciousness originates with atman, the self itself.

3. *The human self veiled by states of consciousness.* The traditional accounting of our various grades of consciousness was outlined first in Chandogya Upanishad 8.7-12. Our states of consciousness begin, at the outermost level, with our ordinary *waking state*, in which we carry out our dealings with the world. Next comes the state of consciousness that we experience when dreaming, a more inward condition in which we continue to perceive forms that are material but of a subtle and phantasmal grade of materiality. Next comes the advanced state of consciousness that we experience in *deep dreamless sleep.* Although in this state we are not unconscious or inanimate, our consciousness of the whole panorama of worldly things vanishes. We achieve an awareness in which there are no divisions or limits, and we have a premonition of the ultimate unity of existence. It is a blissful state; yet in this consciousness we remain aware that we are in a blissfull condition and that this bliss is our own.

Because of this remnant of self-consciousness, the state of dreamless sleep is not the final condition. Further within the concentric pattern lies the ultimate state, which is blissful consciousness alone, without awareness of any object or consciousness of anything but consciousness itself. This is called simply the *fourth state.* In it all material objects, all phantasmal objects, and even the sense of having peace as an individual are gone. There is only the total peace of atman, our true self, which is consciousness alone.

**What is Atman, The Real Self?**

These three efforts to chart the self express one concept in different ways. All three reflect the Hindu conviction that the real person is hidden behind many veils. The real person is not the body in any of its grades; it is not the mind, the intellect, or the psyche as a whole; and it is not perceptible through the senses or known in ordinary states of consciousness. Our real self is a unique metaphysical reality characterized by consciousness. Thus wherever consciousness exists, the atman is present. It is the unseen seer behind the eye, the unheard hearer behind the ear. Atman is the stuff of consciousness.

Defined as the stuff and source of consciousness, the self has characteristics of immense concern to those longing for eternal liberation. For as we shall now see, its characteristics are those already found in the Brahman, the Reality behind the outer universe. Our atman is one and not a heterogeneous thing like our body. When we continue to be conscious in meditation without being conscious of any particular thing at all, then our consciousness has no parts nor any limits. When our eyes are closed in such silent sessions, we are aware only of unbounded and undifferentiated inner space. That is the fundamental condition of our consciousness and what unifies ourselves as persons. Without this unifying consciousness we would be only an inanimate agglomeration of bodily parts, an unconscious corpse. The presence of our consciousness is the secret of our being someone, and therefore it is the atman, our real self.

How else can we define atman? It is spirit. This vague English term conveys at least the idea of something that is not material. The soul within us cannot be tasted, heard, or smelled as material objects can. It cannot be weighed or dissected; yet its reality is undeniable because the reality or atman is attested by the fact of our possessing consciousness. Whereas a Westerner might argue, "I think, therefore I am," a Hindu would say, "I am conscious therefore I am."When we cease to think, we do not cease to be, but when our consciousness is completely gone from us, we are dead. Atman is the secret of the integrity and continuity of a human life.

Furthermore, atman is beyond human concepts and words. Human languages were developed to describe what the senses reveal; they have no words that can truly represent the nature of the internal consciousness from which all our explorations of the world proceed. Even if our senses tried to perceive the reality of another person, they would not be able to detect anything lying deeper than the gross body of that person's outer shell. If we were to turn our own five senses back into ourselves, they would be equally useless in reaching the real person within us. This is because our senses

operate only outwardly in the wrong direction for perception and cannot probe the depths within us where the atman is. The senses aie like a battery of powerful searchlights at reveal what is far away but not the operator who stands behind them and sees everythings with their help. But by an extraordinary inward retraction of the consciousness that normally fills our sense organs, we can know this inmost atman. The mystics who achieve this realization testify that no words are adequate to express what they then perceive.

Finally, atman is germinal. It is the root of a tree of life, from which a person grows forth ever a new, time after time. In the living being the atman is thus the vital principle that sustains life and unifies the embodied self.When this spirit departs and the body, is left, there is no person.

**The Identity of Brahman and Atman**

Thus the answers to the two questions-What is the universe? and Who am I—have converged. Both probes have uncovered a hidden Presence that is nonmaterial. At some fateful moment in the ardent inner searches of postvedic religion, an enlightened sage conceived that the real universe and the real self, since they possessed the same qualities, were identical in essence. The Upanishads' reasoned statements to that effect are only rational supports, however, for a conviction resting actually on a reyelatory experience. The phrase "I am the Brahman!" (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.4.10) that stimulated the creation of the Upanishads was an emotional cry of discovery. The world- renouncing hermits of the forest, striving to restore the vedic trust in a deathless hereafter, had found in their mystical experimentation a relationship between the atman and the immortal Brahman. The opening of the fourth chapter of the Katha Upanishad speaks of an original revelation:

*The Creator pierced the sense-holes outward, so one looks out, not toward the Self within. Some wise man seeking deathlessness with eyes inverted saw the Self direct.*

Here and in other Upanishads (for example, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.3.32 and Maitri Upanishad 6.24ff.), we have the first testimony in Indian literature, and perhaps in world literature, to the experience of oceanic trance in whcih the search for the real self ends in a sense of identity with a reality that is boundless in time and space. Even since this discovery, seekers who follow this monistic path of salvation have sought to reproduce that experience and to enjoy the reassurance that it gives.

This mystical gospel brought comfort to those troubled by postvedic anxieties about death. Accomplished mystics no longer saw themselves as bodies that would deteriorate and die, then be reborn only to deteriorate and die again. In the continuing unity and absolute homogeneity of Brahman there is no possibility of change. The universal Spirit is what we are and what we always shall be. Since there is only one Reality, annoyances and afflictions are psychological creations only. Suffering can be real only if dualities are real—for example, the duality of hammer and thumb, biter and bitten, oneself and rival, and oneself and death Of course, the serene Oneness that absorbed all the sources of these mystics fears absorbed their individually as well. Satisfaction in such an immortal existence was primarily for those who were content to surrender all the values of the personal life To those burdened by the restrictions of the cast system, individual gains and even individual existence had little worth. Many were willing to enter the peace of the universal Oneness forever, disappearing as persons like a dissolving lump of salt. Such a salvation has been the hope of millions of Hindu to the present day. As the Chandogya Upanishad 7.26.2 expresses it:

*Not death does the seer see,*
*nor illness nor any sorrow.*
*The seer sees just the All,*
*attains the All entirely.*

## The Vedanta Tradition

When the formation of the great Upanishads was completed, a new and powerful kind of religion, sometimes called the Vedanta, had

come into existence. The Vedanta is based on a distinctive kind of mystical experience and on a belief in the underlying unity of all reality. Its belief in an all-in-clusive unity carried with it a problem of rational consistency. The Upanishads speak on the one hand of the complex world. On the other hand, they speak of the undivided and all-inclusive Brahman, which they declare to be, alone, the true and universal Being. But how can the universe be divided and not divided at the same time? If Brahman the sole reality is one, must not the multiform world of experience be ruled out as nonexistent? And if the many tings of the world are real, then must not the all-inclusive Brahman be a fiction?

Leaving little literature to reveal their thinking on this disturbing question, followers of the Vedanta tradition quietly increased in number for a thousand years. Even before the Christian Era, there were efforts to summarize in sutras the Vedanta teaching about Brahman, but the earliest of the brahmasutras (as the new writings were called) to came down to us is the brahmasutra of Badarayana, which was probably written in about A.D. 200. It is too terse to be understood without a commentary. The oldest full presentation of the Vedanta system that has come down to us is commentary on the work of Badarayana by the great teacher Sankara writing about A.D. 800. Sankara was the founder of the important Advaita (non-dualistic) school of Vedanta thought.

Sankara's thought focused upon those points in the Upanishads' teaching that remained paradoxical and unclear. An ancient school of materialist thinkers known as Lokayatas (Worldlings) had actually adopted the view that the plurality of things is real and that talk about oneness in Brahman is false. Some Mahayana Buddhists had come close to teaching an opposite doctrine, that the world of plurality, as ordinarily experienced, is a phantasm having no reality or substance whatsoever.Sankara mediated between these extreme positions in an ingenious monistic view of the universe. We shall study those aspects of his teaching that are important to his scheme of salvation.

What is the human being? is a basic question in any Indian outlook. Sankara characterized the ordinary person as being confused

regarding the true answer to the question, "Who am I?" We believe ourselves to be separate individuals, each with a separate body that is real and a lasting part of ourselves. We think that the history of our changing bodies is our own history and that we undergo in our real selves unceasing decay, disease, and death. Because we all believe ourselves, as bodies, to be separate from others, each of us is filled with thoughts of "I" and "mine." Because we think of ourselves as physical beings, we think we can make ourselves happy through the pursuit of bodily comforts, pleasure, and wealth. Sometimes we fail to attain these goals and become dejected, and at other times we succeed and are elated, but only for a moment. We are never satisfied. Therefore we are miserable. But we are unaware of the reason for our misery. We want liberation from rebirth, but do not know how to attain it.

Now, what the revealed Upanishads, assure us, says Sankara, is that we are not individuals now winning and now losing the competitive struggles of this life. Instead, we are eternally one with the universal and immortal Brahman, the only reality. That perfect Being is always characterized by consciousness, being and bliss. It is the Self in all of us and those are our characteristics also. In our daily life, however, we do not perceive the blessed unitary Brahman, and we do not know its bliss Rather, we experience ourselves as bodies filled with needs and hurts, and the universal Soul, unseen, is known to us only as something referred to in the Upanishads. How then can we believe those scriptures?

**Snakara's Four Levels of Knowledge**

In reply, Sankara urged his readers to reflect carefully on the nature and value of the sense experiences on which their understanding of the world was based. Once they perceived how fallible their senses were they would realize that ordinary experience is a poor basis for deciding what is true. Even common sense can tell us that in everyday life we know several grades of experience and several levels of so-called knowledge, and that they do not have the same value with regard to truth. Sankara distinguished four levels of knowledge:

1. *Verbal knowledge*. This, the very lowest kind of knowledge has

no reality beyond the reality of words, which contain contradictions and cannot, therefore, refer to anything beyond themselves. We can speak about a square circle or the children of a barren woman, but none of us will ever experience in real life a square circle or meet children born to a barren woman. We can experience only the words. Such verbal knowledge has no objective validity. It is simply false.

2. *Deluded knowledge.* When we look out over a hot shimmering plain and see in the distance a "lake" that is only a mirage, our knowledge of the "lake" is a deluded knowledge. Again, we often catch sight of a "silver coin" on a sandy beach and on rushing to pick it up we find that it is only a silvery shell. We realize that our knowledge of the "coin" was deluded even though based on an apprehension of a reality. Such experiences may be convincing for a short time, but their erroneousness is easily detected. Soon we realize that the object of experience was mistakenly perceived. The actuality was only hot air on a plain, only a shell emfedded in the sand. Such mistakes are corrected by our own later experience and by the experience of others, who laugh and tell us that we are looking at a mirage or a shell.

3. *Empirical knowledge.* This kind of knowledge comes to us when we see real lakes and real coins, We can check such data by observing them at a later time or by asking other people for their impressions of these objects, thereby confirming the "correctness" of our information. One generation passes down its empirical knowledge to its children, who find it useful and develop sciences that help them survive in this life. It is this empirical knowledge that convinces us we are all separate persons who have separate souls and bodies. It convinces us, too, that in our real selves we are bodies that suffer injuries and diseases, grow old, and die. Therefore Sankara asserted that empirical knowledge, despite its worldly usefulness, needs to be corrected. It misleads us on a matter of utmost importance: our supposed individuality as separate suffering beings. Fortunately, empirical knowledge, too, can be superseded when we rise to insight of a still higher grade.

4. *Supreme (paramarthika) knowledge.* According to Sankara,

there is a final and highest form of experience that yields knowledge that is absolute truth. Unlike empirical knowledge, paramarthika knowledge is not obtained through the senses mind, or intellect, but directly through the consciousness of the atman alone. This supreme experience comes when our fallible senses are made to cease their operation and the conceptualizing activities of the intellect are stopped. When our psychic organs are put to rest and all our power of consciousness is concentrated in our innermost self, a unique state of consciousness called *samadhi* is reached. In this state, a distorting film is removed from the consciousness of the introverted mystic who is able then to apprehend reality as it actually is. The understanding of what is real and what is unreal undergoes a remarkable reversal:

*In what all beings call night*
*the disciplined sage awakes;*
*That wherein beings awaken*
*that the silent one sees as night.*

(Bhagavadgita 2.69)

Direct perception reveals to the mystic that the separateness of persons is false and that the oneness of all is the truth. As the Upanishads teach reality is one without the slightest division or posibility of change, and this one immortal Being is pure consciousness and pure bliss. This universal consciousness, timeless and immune to all ills, is what we really are. The defects of our bodies and our bodies themselves are delusions comparable to a mirage. There is liberation from all distress for those who have attained this knowledge. Those mystics are at peace now and forever who realize their oneness with the blissful Brahman.

**Sankara's Doctrine of Maya**

In setting forth his doctrine of salvation, Sankara found it necessary to explain why we are so seldom aware of ourselves as the changeless, blissful, and all-knowing Brahman, and why we so usually experience ourselves as individuals who age and die. Sankara's solution to this problem was the doctrine of *maya.*

We must infer, he says, that there is a mysterious impersonal force

that causes an unreal pluralistic universe to be projected upon the one cosmic reality that in truth is undivided. Because its effects are undeniable, such a force must be believed to exist and operate. When operating to distort our perception of the cosmos, it may be called maya. It is the deluding influence of maya that causes us to project upon the universal Brahman which is the single reality the many figments that make up our everday world. They can be compared to the "lakes" snf "silver coins" we sometimes think we see. Cosmically maya conceals unity and projects plurality, exposing all living creatures to shared delusions that are not private but social. Subjectively maya operates in the psyche as a deluding factor that may be called *avidya*, or ignorance. Working within us, it affects our consciousness of our own natures, making us apprehend ourselves wrongly as separate individuals, each composed of a body and soul.

Sankara admitted that it is difficult to understand what the substance of maya is and where it exists. If maya is real, its substance must necessarily be Brahman, the sole and all- inclusive reality. But maya and Brahman have contradictory natures: Brahman is absolute unity, changelessness, consciousness, knowledge, and bliss, whereas maya is all plurality, the principle of change, the source of ignorance and the case of all suffering. Maya cannot be in Brahman, because it would cancel and destroy its nature; or can it be a—differentiated part of Brahman because Brahman has no parts. Maya is not a reality separate from Brahman because Brahman is the only reality. Although maya is not real, it is also not unreal because the unreal cannot produce effects, as maya can and does with utmost power, Similarly, the products of maya are neither real nor unreal. They are not unreal because they are delusions projected onto Brahman and have the reality of Brahman as their base. At the same time, they are not real because only ignorance gives them their apparent separate identities. The entire familiar world produced by maya is transient and deceitful, and yet not entirely unreal.

Neither real nor unreal, not within Brahman nor yet outside of Brahman, a factor whose status cannot be explained, maya is nevertheless a principle in whose existence we must believe. We

dare not ignore it. Maya causes the world to appear and causes us to believe wordly things that are false. It causes souls to appear and believe in their own plurality, although that plurality is false. It causes selfish behavior and a sense of individual responsibility for selfish acts. It binds illusionary individuals to illusionary bodies. It is the source of all human sin, misery, and bondage. Since maya is the supreme impediment to salvation, all religious effort should be directed toward dispelling this ignorance (avidya) within ourselves. Our one noble desire is our longing for the moment when avidya will vanish from us forever along with our attachment to the things of this world. We can hope to attain this liberation if we are willing to renounce all other desires and the world it self, and adopt the arduous life of those seeking salvation through the Way of Knowledge.

**Renunciation (Sanyasa)**

To attain extraordinary knowledge, extraordinary meand are required; the mere study ofn doctrine is not enough. Those who have followed the Way of Knowledge have had to develop a sensitivity to hidden realities by retraining their entire psyche, dedicating their lives wholly to this effort.

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.5 tells us that when the sage Yajnavalkya embarked on a serious search for liberation, he abandoned his family and property and went off into the forest. Throughout history, persons engaged in contemplation have found seclusion helpful to the attainment of mystical experience. For Hindu mystics monasticism was made even more attractive by the tedium of their life in an increasingly restrictive social world. While the Upanishads were being composed. Hindu spiritual seekers felt a more and more intense need to remove themselves from society. In the early and orthodox Upanishads the term *sannyasa* (renunciation) referred to the renunciation of earthly desires, but within a few centuries sannyasa came to mean the renunciation of the world.

In the dharmasastras that were beginning to be written in about this same period, such a renunciation of the world was idealized in a conception of the *sannyasasrama*, the fourth and final asrama of a

person's spiritual career. The religious life of an individual was to proceed through gradeu stages of effort arranged in a hierarchical pattern like that of the social order and the universe. As stated in chapter eight of the *Laws of Manu*. spiritual seekers were expected to pass through the stages of student and householder and theoretically through the stage of vanaprastha, or forest dweller, Then, in a consummating stage, all were expected, as sannyasis, to abandon the world entirely.

By making sannyasa the final stage of spiritual effort, the religion of the Upanishads joined itself to the mainstream of Hinduism. Followers of the Vedanta tradition were henceforth convinced that they must, sooner or later, abandon the life of the householder for that of the wandering monk. For more than two thousand years, mendicants in saffron robes carrying a staff and begging bowl have been a conspicuous feature of Hinduism.

Not all of these holy men know the thought of the Upanishads or share the goals of the Advaita Vedanta. Some are adherents of bhakti religion, who have given up their worldly occupations only to spend all their time in devotion to their god. Some seek power through ancient practices of selfmortification, and some are disoriented persons with vague aspirations. The term *sadhu* (good mantends to be applied to all religious wanderers; sannyasi tends to be reserved for persons presumed to be learned in the scriptural traditions of the Way of Knowledge and to be serious seekers of liberation.

The decision to become a sannyasi is a stricts personal choice. The Upanishads do not say what age this move should be made, but it is clear that the growing influence of the Upanishads soon stirred up a massive movement to the forest of youths on the verge of manhood. The author of the Bhagavadgita expressed Hindu society's general dismay at the loss of the services of those who had not yet contributed the labor of their productive years. The dharmasastras drew up a defensive rule that world renunciation should be delayed until the declining years of one's life, "when a householder sees his skin wrinkled, and his hair white ..." (The Laws of Manu 6:2). Such delaying of monastic living until old age

has always been honored as the ideal, but in practice younger persons who are insistent have been allowed to enter the monastic life. The essential qualification, really, is disillusion with the pleasures of the worldmand a deep longing for liberation from rebirth.

Even though still living the life of a householder, Hindus committed to the Vedanta teaching may make preparations to hasten the time of their salvation. They should avoid bad conduct, which destroys serenity (Katha Upanishad 2.24), and they should curb the ego and calm the mind by selfless performance of their duties. They should strive to perfect themselves in five ethical virtues that are the first steps in the formal eight-stage yoga or discipline of the Way of Knowledge. Called the five yamas, these five preparatory moral requirements are (1) noninjury (ahimsa), the great Hindu ideal of nonviolence toward all living beings; (2) truthfulness (*satya*); (3) honesty (*asteya*); (4) chastity (*brahmacarya*); and (5) freedom from greed (*aparigraha*).

While still members of the laity, Hindus can alsom cultivate the five niyamas—five mental virtues that constitute the second preparatoru stage in the eight-stage yoga. They are (1) purity (sauca), cleanliness of body and diet; (2) contentment (samtosha); (3) austerity (tapas), the development of powers of self-denial and endurance; (4) study (svadhyaya), the pondering of religious texts and doctrines; and (5) meditation on the Lord (isvarapranidhana). Although followers of the Way of Knowledge regard the concept of a personal God as deluded, they regard theistic meditation as valuable for those who have not yet fully attained a monistic comprehension of the Divine.

Instructions for living as a layperson are often given in terms that are less formal than these lists. Sankara simply says that spiritual seekers should devote themselves to constant meditation on the truths of Vedanta teaching, studying the Upanishads and contemplating such scriptural statements as "I am the Brahman."

After years or lifetimes of such preparation, it is believed, a layperson will suddenly perceive that it is time to renounce the world. The precipitating factor may be some dramatic

manifestation of the transience or futility of life. A king looks into a mirror and detects in his heard the first gray hair; there is a death in the family, a domestic quarrel, the collapse of a career: such experiences may reveal to individuals the vanity possessions and the shortness of life.

The actual departure of the would-be sannyasi from his family and village is a solemn ritual. In a round of farewell calls the departing one gives away his prized possessions. He performs his last ritual as a householder. In a formal separation from his home, he leaves his village on foot, and his son escorts him for a stated distance on his way. Finally, at a certain spot father and son take a back--to-back position, the son facing toward the village the father towerd th unknown. Both stride off resolutely in their respective directions without looking back. The father must walk straight ahead until the end of the day without stopping. Theoretically he should never again mention the name of his village nor even think of it.

For him a completely new life begins. He becomes a wandering beggar, building no fire and cooking no food. Appearing at a house door just after the time of dinner, he eats whatever scraps he may be given. He sleeps wherever night overtakes him—ideally under a tree, but perhaps at a temple or a charitabel shelter for monks. Rarely, such seekers reside for extended periods in a *matha* (monastic establishment), but no special value is attached to cloistered living. Mendicants rove as the spirit moves them, visiting temples, attending religious fairs (*melas*), stopping at places of religious pilgrimage (*tirthas*), or lingering on mountains noted as places of meditation. The monk has no family obligations, no ritual duties and no work to do. He is free. He will attain in his own time, alone, the liberation he is seeking.

In this spontaneous new life the irritations of a restrictive society are eased. The former caste of the holy man is forgotten, and its restrictions no longer apply. If gifted, the holy man may become an eminent teacher or spiritual guide. Earlier confined to a life of well-defined duties in a single community, he is now his own master, free to roam and to live on alms, on the sole condition that he

forever separate himself from society, concerns. Sannyasa has been the outlet for millions of sensitive Hindus who could not endure the confinements of caste life. Sannyasa has also been the safety valve of the Hindu caste community, siphoning off the discontent of those who would otherwise have destroyed it. The institution of the fourth asrama, like the doctrine of karma, has been a great supporting pillar of the classical Hindu culture.

Since the skills developed in the worldly life do not help in the inner explorations of the piritual path, the renouncer quickly seeks out a guru, a teacher who has himself made the mystical journey and reached the other shore. It is believed that destiny provides each seeker with his own true guru and that when they finally meet face to face, each recognizes the other.

The guru now administers the rite of *diksa*, an irreversible initiation into the final asrama of life. It is a ritual death to the world and a rebirth into the realm of transcendence. The teacher rips off the disciple's sacred thread and cuts off his queue, the tuft of hair that has identified him as a canforming Hindu. Henceforth the disciple willl no longer be bound by the rules of any caste. The personal name by which he has been known is uttered for the last time; and the teacher confers on him a new name devoid of caste significance and pointing to some religious truth. The guru should instruct his disciple in doctrine in the new way of life. When the disciple is judged ready, he is guided in the advanced meditational discipline which is called yoga.

### Yoga

The term yoga, like its English cognate yoke, means "to join, to unite" and also "to harness up, to set seriously to work." Followers of the monistic Vedanta tradition understand yoga as the process that brings about conscious union of one's own soul with the world Soul. Other Hindu groups think of yoga as any systematic programme of meditation. There are several systems of yoga. *Hathayoga* is a physical discipline used to tone the body; it may or may not be followed by deeper meditations. The Tantric schools, whose position is marginal in Hin duism, practice a *kundalini* yoga that has its own unusual imagery. Some modern

mystical movements have developed their own unusual yogic practices. But for most Hindus, yoga refers to a version of the eight-stage yoga developed by the ancient sage Patanjali, whose exact dates are uncertain.

The eight-stage yoga begins with the yamas and niyamas. The third stage is *asana*, which means "seat"—both the site where the meditators settle themselves and the bodily posture they adopt. The site should be secluded. If possible, meditators (yogis) should seat themselves on grass covered with a deerskin or cloth. They may adopt many positions, but serious meditators tend to adopt a simple posture with legs crossed and hands folded atop one another on the lap. The aim of asana is not to strain the body, but to make it possible to forget the body so that a higher identity may become known.

*Pranayama*, the next stage, involevs special control of one's breathing. We have noted a vedic belief that a cosmic breath was and is the root of all things and that one's breath is something very near to one's own essence. By training the breath, then, one can draw nearer to the basis of one's very being. Separate attention is given to timing the inhalation, retention, and exhalation of the breath. This timing is often measured by repetitions of om, the sacred syllable symbolizing Brahman. One of the effects of severely restricting one's breathing— the rise of luminous internal experiences—is regarded as a positive step toward the attainment of the mystical goal. Svetasvatara Upanishad 12.11-14 lists the consequences of breath repression:

*Mist, smoke, wind, fire,*
*fireflies, lightying, crystal, a moon—*
*these are the preliminary forms*
*that manifest Brahman in yoga.*

Breath regulation also helps mental concentration and creates calmness and a readiness for activities requiring calmness as their base.

*Pratyahara* is the retraction of the senses from attention to any external objects. Like a turtle pulling its legs into its shell, the yogi

must retreat into himself and break off contact with the outer world. In this way he can concentrate all of his powers of consciousness, focusing them intensely inward upon what is at the centre of his being.

*Dharana* is the steadying of the power of attention so that the meditator can concentrate on a chosen object or matter as long as he wishes. Often the guru chooses what his disciple is to foucs on: perhaps an image of a favorite deity: a *yantra* (a boss or stud of metal cast into a symbolic pattern); the tip of the nose or an imagined spot between the eyebrows: or an imaginary lotus or lamp within the heart.

*Dhyana* is deep and long meditation on powerful symbols of the religious faith. The yogi of Vedanta conviction may ponder the meaning of the central utterances of the Upanishads, such as "Thou art That" or "I am the *Brahman.*" It is also common to use the vedic syllable om, of verbal symbol of the Absolute that is sometimes called the sound-Brahman:

*Two are the Brahmans to be known:*
*the Brahman that is sound, and the one above it.*
*Adepts in the sound-Brahman*
*the higher Brahma do attain.*

(Mariti Upanishad 6.22)

Reciting om at first aloud and then silently, the meditator continues until the sound reverberates in his inner consciousness even after his utterance has ceased, and he is carried into a realm where nothing is known but the Reality that om represents. The awareness of individual selfhood neats extinction, and if the yogi is bold enough to press on into this extinction, he enters into the culminating experience of monistic yoga, *samadhi.*

Samadhi (concentration) begins when the yogi's awareness, long focused on a single point, swells explosively to encompass limitless Reality. A sense of all-reaching participation in a living cosmos sweeps over him, and his own self appears to be swallowed up in a luminous ocean. The sense of infinite oneness is understood by the mystic to be a revelation taking precedence over all earlier insight:

it is the final truth about the nature of things—Plural things and plural souls are no longer seen as real. But the disappearance of individuality does not bring nothingness. The real person is found in a universal consciousness in which there are no distinctions no possibility of change, and no sense of time. Births become phantasmal events that do not really occur, and deaths become appearances without reality. Meditators who know this experience understand themselves to be forever free.

In the assurance of immortality implicit in the unitive mystical experience, seekers of the age the Upanishads recovered, substantially, the paradise that had been lost at the end of the vedic Attained by different means, it was a different paradise which could be enjoyed only by renouncing all earthly values and even personal existence itself. But millions of Hindu meditators over the centuries have judged this sacrifice to be not too high a price to pay for liberation from the bondage of the world.

People who undergo this experience are called *jivanmuktas* (those liberated while still living). They are believed to have undergone an irreversible change. Stripped now of all sense of self and incapable of any self-serving act, they will acquire no new karma. When their old karma is expended, their bodies will die for the last time. They will then enter into final liberation in Brahman, never to be born again.

Some of the most tamous Hindu saints have been natural mystics who had no need to practice yoga but achieved the unitive experience spontaneously and without conscious effort. There are some teachers today who deny the necessity of yoga and urge their disciples to await such a natural revelation.

Will all those who take up the search for mystical realization achieve it? Hindus have usually held that the chance of success is small for those who remain in society as householders, and that even renunciation of the world and a lifetime of meditational effort may not be sufficient. They feel that the outcome of yoga lies outside human control. Several Upanishads speak of success in meditation as dependent on the grace of God (Katha 2.20,23; Svetasvatara 3.20). Sankara noted that for a monist (that is, one

who believes that the Divine Being is not a person), there can be no such giver of grace; thus the matter remains a mystery, hidden perhaps in the unknown karma of former lives that assist some seekers and impede others. If realization is not achieved in the present life, however, all agree that the efforts of strivers are not lost. Reborn to more favorable situations, they will eventually attain illumination and the liberation that is their goal.

## Classical Hinduism: Way of Devotion

The third of the Hiudu margas, the Way of Devotion or bhaktimarga, places its hope for liberation in the power of a personal God of the universe. Two great theistic movements in Hinduism—one centered on Sive, the other centered on Visnu-have been exceedingly popular for two thousand years. Together, they probably hold the allegiance of a majority of Hindus today. These two forms of Indian religion are the most similar to the faiths of the West.

Like the Way of Knowledge, the Way of Devotion was a product of the stressful period when followers of the Vedic religion for the first time experienced a regimented social order, and when even the heavens no longer offered hope of lasting freedom. The Way Knowledge and Buddhism offered release from karma and the unwanted round of lives, but at the cost of continuing existence as a person. Many Hindus cherished their own individuality too highly to find satisfaction in such liberations. In intellectual struggles they gradually worked out a different plan of salvation through a personal God of new stature. This development was difficult for people reared in the vedic tradition, because the comprehensive forces that control human life—rta or dharma, and karma-were conceived as impersonal principles. The personal gods of the Veda, on the other hand, were thought to reside in some specific region of the natural world, enjoying only limited powers and functions. Even the greatest gods were believed to control only a portion of the universe.

Speculations about a cosmic god with *universal* jurisdiction began in the late ved· · hymns, but the notion of such a deity developed only slowly into a monotheism. The rise of the conception of a

universal world-essence helped greatly in the emergence of monotheism when, in the Svetasvatara Upanishad (around the fifth century B.C.), the vedic god Rudra (now known also as Siva) is described as Brahman, the totality of all begin and all power. As the source and the essence of all material things and all souls, the Lord Siva rules over all. He pervades persons, is present in their hearts, and as a radiance within he may be perceived by meditatiors who practice yoga. When we see him in ourselves as Siva the Kindly, devotion (*bhakti*) to him is born. In response God's grace is activated. It was he who created karma, and what he created he can break When the fetters of karma are broken, there begins a life of freedom, including freedom from death.

A century or two later the Bhagavadgita continued this use of the metaphysical idea of the universal Brahman to sustain a monotheistic theology. The Brahman doctrine became the foundation of the metaphysical understanding of God in at branches of the bhaktimarga. The term *bhakti* rives from a verb meaning "to divide and slare as when food is divided and shared at family and caste gatherings. The noun *bhakti* implies the unreserved loyslty and willingness to serve, combined with the special gratitude and trust found among those who share in the bounty extended by the elders who control such affectionate gatherings. *Bhaktas*, or devotees who follow the Way of Devotion, have discovered such affection at the center of the universe in "The great Lord of all the worlds, A friend of all creatures" (Bhagavadgita 5.29). Despite this common understanding of the nature of God, the Way of Devotion has from the beginning consisted of two separate streams: the worshipers of Siva, known as Saivas, and the worshipers of Visnu, who have long been called Vaisnavas. Let us begin with the Saivite tradition.

## The Worship of Siva

As Rudra the Howler, Siva is known in the Vedas as a power operating in destructive rainstorms. His back is red and his neck is blue. He dwells apart from the other deities, in the mountains, and his retainers include robbers, ghosts, and goblins. His weapons include sharp arrows and the dreaded thunderbolt, which even the

gods fear, and in the vedic-hymns none who worship him assume that they are safe from him. He attacks many with fever, cough, and poisons; yet he is a physician also, who possesses a thousand remedies.

Those drawn to Siva's worship have been especially sensitive to the harshness and brevity of life in this world. Seeing death as an ever-present reality, Siva's worshipers have understood that safety can be found-if at all—only by dealing with the one who presides over such dangers. Saivism has usually included within its fringes many small groups of alienated, morbid, and misanthropic persons drawn by the religion's stark realism who perceived Siva as the special divine force behind all natural processes of destruction. In time, however, the worships of Siva among some people outgrew the status of a special cult within polytheism and developed a monotheistic theology. And as the following of the deity increased, persons of more optimistic disposition entered this Saiva circle, and the mood of Siva- worship became more boldly hopeful.

## The Lingam and Yoni Emblem

In the first century B.C. shrines dedicated to Siva began to appear. In some shrines the object of worship was a stone pillar resembling the male generative organ. Siva had come to be regarded as a source of procreation as well as of destruction. Images of Siva in human form were also common. The worship of the *lingam* (phallic emblem) did not become dominant until it had evolved into a plain vertical cylinder rounded at the top, only vaguely phallic, a symbol rather than a representation of the sex organ. The four faces looking out from the sides of the shaft indicate the omniscience of the god, who faces in all directions. Within a few centuries it became customary to seat the cylinder in a shallow spouted dish. Originally this rimmed dish was a basin for catching liquid oblations poured over the lingam by worshipers, but soon it was thought to be a *yoni*, or female organ, representing Siva's *sakti*, or female reproductive power.The combined icon shows the Saivas' recognition of the importance of the feminine element in all divine activity in the cosmos.

A combined lingam andn yoni icon usually stands at the center of

Saiva shrines. Modern Hindu scholars insist that this emblem refers to metaphysical truths only, even though it uses images of the human genitals. Indeed the rites of lingam worship have not been orgiastic or focused on erotic interests. The icon makes a statement about the cosmos: Siva's potent generative power is eternally at work, a force for life as well as for destruction. Because the people of the Indus Valley civilization used phalluses in their cult, many scholars believe that the lingam and perhaps other aspects of Siva worship entered Hinduism from this old source, but the demonstration of a connection with that distant cultural past is not complete.

A tale about the lingam, told in both the *Linga* and the *Siva* Puranas, illustrates how mythmakers tried to express monotheistic understandings of Siva. Once, while the universe was still in a state of dissolution, Brahman the creator-god wandered over the primeval waters and encountered Visnu. Each greeted the other in a condescending manner, indicating that each considered the other his inferior, and soon a fierce argument, over seniority ensued. As they quarreled, a great pillar of flame rose suddenly out of the lower darkness and shot upward out of sight. Silenced, Brahma and Visnu decided to find out more about the pillar by searching for its upper and lower ends. In the form of a swan Brahman flew upward out of sight, and Visnu in the form of a boar, pushed downward with his snout to find the pillar''s base. After a thousand years the two gods returned defeated, unable to find the upper or lower end of the pillar. It was infinite. As they huddled in frustration, a humming sound began to emerge from the pillar. It was the sound of the sacred syllable om, the symbol of absolute Being. Then the great pillar opened, and Siva manifested himself.

The piller was Siva's lingam, the eternal and limitless source of all things. Visnu in his boar form bows before Siva, and Brahman also acknowledged Siva's supremacy. Seeing their humble worship, Siva extends to both deities the open palm of reassurance and blessing.

The story of the infinite lingam dramatizes the creativity of Siva as a masculine force. The presence in Siva of a corresponding

feminine power is recognized in Saiva myths about his wife, who is known as Uma, Parvati, or Durga, The most vivid of all the assertions of Siva's bisexual nature is the common image of Siva as Ardhanarisvara, the Half-Woman Lord. The left side of this image, always the distaff side in India, displays Siva's feminine nature: a large woman's earring, a conspicuous breast, bangles around the wrists, and a left leg clothed in a clinging silk skirt. On the male side Sive wears as his breech clout a tiger skin, his earring is a serpent, and in his upper right hand he holds the flaming ax that he once snatched out of the air when hostile sages hurled it at him.

**Siva's Dual Nature**

The acknowledgment of the feminine in Siva reflected another development in the growth of his popularity: the softening of his fierce and threatening nature. As Saivism grew in popularity during the first five centuries A.D. the mythology of Siva developed in new directions in the epics and puranas. Siva did not lose his old threatening characteristics but developed a dual nature that included a kindlier side. Showing his destructiveness still, Siva in the puranas haunts the cremation grounds, his body smeared with the ashes of the dead. (Preparation for the worship of Siva is still made by rubbing ashes over one's body and marking one's forehead with three horizontal stripes of white ash.) Siva wears a necklace made of skulls, the skulls of the Brahmans of past eons, whom he has outlived and whose creations he has brought to an end. Stories of his wildly destructive acts continue to be told, and new names arise that stress his ferocious and terrible nature. Some orders of ancient Siva devotees shocked their contemporaries by dwelling in cremation grounds, or by practicing bloody sacrifices, or using skulls as alms bowls.

As Siva became a universal God, however, new myths showed him using his dreadful powers in constructive ways. In vedic times he was known as a handler of poisons, but in the new mythology his old skill with poisons reappears in the story of how he came to be called Nilakantha (the Bluethroated). The gods, who had not yet attained exemption from death, decided to seek endless life by churning the Sea of Milk in order to extract from it the nectar of

immortality. The churn was rotated by wrapping around its spindle the long body of Vasuki, the king of serpents, which was stretched from one shore of the sea to the other. To provide a base for the spindle on the bottom of the sea, Visnu took the form of a tortoise. The gods and the demons pulled on their respective ends. Just as the nectar started to emerge from the sea, Vasuki grew sick and vomited venom from each of his thousand heads, and over the surface of the sea spread a blue black mass, the deadly Halahala poison that could kill even the gods.

When all the gods, including Visnu, were almost overcome by the poison, Siva came to the rescue. Riding his bull Nandi, he arrived at the seashore, picked up a large shell, skimmed off the dark liquid, and drank it to the last drop. But even Siva was not totally immune to the poison, which lodged in his throat, turning it blue. Devotees gazing at pictures of the blue-throated Siva are reminded of the lengths to which their God would go to save his worshipers from danger. Another favorite myth celebrate. Siva's bringing down from heaven the Ganges River, whose sacred waters have ever since refreshed the land.

**Siva as the One God**

After A.D. 400 a number of groups arose that worshiped Siva as the supreme God. Sanskrit manuals called *agamas* were composed to guide their members in proper rituals and beliefs and in the making of images and temples. The first full-scale books of Savia religious philosophy were written in Kashmir betweeen A.D. 800 and 1200. But after that time Saiva monotheism declined in northern India, and today in most northern regions Siva is worshiped only as one member of the general pantheon of gods.

In the south, however, the worship of Siva as the one God expanded greatly. Since the seventh century A.D. a group of Tamil speakers near the tip of the Indian subcontinent has followed a theological tradition that came to be called the Saivasiddhanta. In addition, the sect of the Virasaivas or Lingayats has been popular among Kannada speakers since the twelfth century A.D.

As early as the seventh century A.D. there arose among the Tamils

a series of remarkable poets, beginning with Appar and Sambandar, whose beautiful hymns are still sung. As recently as the seventeenth century there were new surges of devotion in Tamil literature, and poet named Sivavakkiyar praised the uniqueness of Siva in these lines:

*Not Vishnu, Brahma, Siva*
*In the Bryond is He,*
*Not black, nor white, nor ruddy,*
*This Source of things that be;*
*Not great is he, not little,*
*Not female and not male-*
*But stands far, far, and far beyond*
*All being's utmost pale!*

The early Tamil poets' belief in a personal God was placed in great difficulty, however, by the subtle and powerful arguments of the philosopher Sankara on behalf of a religion of the impersonal Brahman. Among the devotees of Siva a need was felt for intellectual defenders of the Saiva beliefs. The earliest Saiva theologians in the south were Meykanar and his disciple Arulnandi, who taught in the thirteenth centur.

By calling Siva *Pasupati,* the Lord of Cattle, the Saivasiddhanta theologians wished to emphasize the protective aspect of Siva's nature. (In Western religions, worshipers have spoken of the "Good Shepherd" to express a similar understanding. From the word Pasupati are derived the three basic topics of this theological system: *pasu* (a domestic animal and, by extension, a human soul). pari (owner or lord), and *pasa* (tether or bond). These three terms are used to convey a message that the Lord Siva feels concern for human souls and seeks to free them from the bonds that prevent then from attaining salvation.

According to the Saiva theologians, many souls are deluded in regard to their nature, imagining themselves to be physical beings only, and beings separate from others, as all bodies are. They are not aware that God dwells in all, and that all are possessed and guided by God. Ignorant of the helping power of Siva, they are helplessly bound by the three tethers. The tether *anava* (belittling

ignorance) causes souls to perceive themselves as petty isolated beings existing only to serve themselves The tether karma is the accumulated energy of past deeds that binds souls to rebirths for the purpose or reward and punishment. The tether maya is the physical stuff of all things, including human bodies that dominate the attention of human beings and cause them to act as if physical pleasure were the purpose life.

Siva offers many kinds of spiritual assistance to help humans liberate themselves from these bonds. He continually creates, preserves, and destroys all things physical-both worlds and bodies—so that souls may live and learn, Siva deliberately conceals himself so that souls will seek him, tantalized. To those who have learned to desire him, he sends, according to their advancement, first a spiritual preceptor, then visions of himself as the master of karma, and finally an Inner Light in which Siva is known and liberation is achieved. In many shrines in southern India the principal Saiva beliefs are expressed in images of Siva as the supreme daneer Siva is worshiped there as the creator, preserve and destroyer of life, and as a gracious, guide.

The union with God of which these Saivas speak is not like that of the Advaita because it entails no loss of one's sense of individuality nor any sense that the worshiper has become divine. Rather, it produces a feeling of being intimately supported by a gracious and perfect Lord. After the liberating experience, devotees are expected to live joyously and freely. They frequent temples and assemblies of believers not out of obligation, but in order to engage in spontaneous worships, and to dance and sing the hymns of the ancient saints.

The Saivasiddhanta doctrine is the living belief of millions of people today in the Tamil country, where several monastic centers of learning are maintained. Their leaders object to the Advaita doctrine, saying that it is blasphemous for human beings to identify themselves with God. But they appreciate all religions of devotion to a personal God, saying that the adherents of Christianity and Islam, because of their right religious attitudes, will be reborn into the saving Saiva faith.

**Saktism**

Saktism receives its name from its principal teaching: that the Great Goddess who is the focus of Sakta worship is the sakti—the active world-creating and world-controlling power of Siva. The Sakta religion developed in long interaction with the worship of Siva. It is studied at this point for the advantage of viewing it in connection with Saivism, on which it depended for two thousand years for some aspects of its growth. Saktas accept the Saiva symbols and myths and acknowledge Siva to be the passive and masculine aspect of the Godhead, but they themselves prefer to worship the feminine side of the polarity because they conceive her to be the force that determines the course of all that goes on in the natural universe. Though they understand this ruling power to be a single personal being, they call her Uma, Parvati, Candi, Bhairavi, Camunda, Kali, and other names connected with various acts of hers related in myths. Her primary name is Durga, because she is known by that name in the heroic tale that her worshipers love most.

Durga is worshiped at centers of pilgrimage throughout India. Her devotees live in significant numbers in Gujarat and Rajasthan and especially in Bengal and adjacent regions of northeast India, including the Himalayan nation of Nepal. Every year, in late September and October, the entire Hindu population of Bengal celebrates the *Durga Puja*, a festival during which Durga's deliverance of the world from the attack of the buffalo-demon Mahisha is narrated. In local pavilions, enthusiasts erect temporary clay images of Durga brandishing her many weapons in her many hands. On each night Durga's victories are retold by chanting the *Devi Mahatmya* a Sanskrit narrative poem written in about the sixth century A.D. and the Saktas' favorite scripture. On the last night of the recitations, the festival is concluded by sacrificing a goat or a buffalo as an offering to Durga. This rite is almost the sole survival of animal sacrifice in modern brahmanical Hinduism.

Saktism is of particular interest as the modern world's most highly developed worship of a supreme female deity. The worship of Durga has most of the characteristics of monotheism. Her power

alone is understood to create, control, and destroy all phenomenal things, and thus no Sakta worship is directed to any being who is not one of her forms or appearances. But Durga is not understood to be the whole of the divine nature; the realm of the transcendent and changeless is Sivas, and those who seek liberation from the world (moksa) must seek it by meditation on Siva in yoga. Saktas, however, express little desire for moksa. As people concerned about the world, they seek from the goddess health, wealth, and general well-being. Because the goal of Saktism is seldom salvation, this faith cannot be classified as one of the religions of the bhaktimarga, even though Sakta worship is often performed with fervent devotion, or bhakti.

**Origins of Saktism**

Saktism did not originate with the goddesses of the Vedas or directly from the cult of Siva. Its earliest traces are seen about the time of Christ in rural areas in unorganized forms of the worship of goddesses who continued certain aspects of the mother goddess cult of the Indus Valley civilization. This matrix of ancient rural religion probably included ancient forms of the present worship of the dangerous village godlings. The brahmans first ignored these non-Aryan goddesses, but in the first few centuries A.D., s few brahmans and other Hindus who wrote in Sanskrit began to notice certain deties of the rural pantheon. In late portions of the *Mahabharata* epic, the goddess Durga is mentioned as receiving offerings of liquor and flesh from members of certain mountain tribes. There are also references to Camunda, the emaciated goddess of famine, and to Kali, a ghoulish figure with disheveled hair who roams battlefields eating human flesh and delighting in the blood of the slain. In later literary references these goddesses have become members of Siva's entourage, and later still, his wives. The worshipers of these goddesses made their deities not merely Siva's wives, but also metaphysically his saktis, or creative powers in the formation of the world. Adopting the strong Saiva tendency toward monotheism, they too attempted to create from their feminine pantheon a more rational theological interpretation of the world than polytheism could provide.

Beginning in the first or second century A.D. preeminence was given to a group of goddesses called the Seven Mothers (*Saptamatrika*), who were worshiped sometimes as a group and sometimes separately. They are thought to be dangerous beings, though some are kindly in appearance. Usually the goddesses in the set are accompanied by a child. They are generally represented in sculptures as full-breasted, and some look down on the child with tenderness. At the other end of the extreme stands the dreadful Camunda, a childless destroyer of life in general and a killer by famine in particular, Thus, the followers of the Sakta religion perceive the natural world as filled with threats and anxiously seek security.

In the *Devi Mahatmya* Durga is spoken of as the unification of all the feminine powers. She is proclaimed to be the eternal consort of Siva and the sole creator and ruler of the world. The Seven Mothers and the other goddesses are said to be no more than temporary manifestations of her various powers. Even the much-worshipped Kali became part of Durga's essence. Yet as manifestations of Durga, the special names and characteristics of these old goddesses continued to be remembered in worship. This complex conception of the Great Goddess allows Saktas to interpret very different human situations in a religious manner.

Among Sakta believers two quite different moods can be found. Sometimes the furious Goddess take the field as the champion of life. At other times Sakta believers perceive her rage as directs against themselves, and they pray that her violence may be averted, or they reflect that the Mother of the World brings suffering and death, just as she gives joy and life, and that her acts are divine and must be endured even when she inflicts horrors.

The assurance given by Sakta teaching enables believers to accept harsh experiences in a spirit of devotion. Such a calm acceptance of the tragedies of life is found in the Bengali poetry of Ramaprasad Sen (1718-1775), the greatest modern poet of Kali devotion, who expressed his view of his own sufferings in these words:

*Though the mother beat him;*
*The child cries, "Mother, O Mother!"*

*and clings still tighter to her garment.*
*True, I cannot see thee,*
*yet I am not a lost child.*
*I still cry, "Mother, Mother"....*
*All the miseries that I have suffered*
*and am suffering, I know, O Mother,*
*to be your mercy alone.*2

Although the Hindu conceptions of Durga and Kali are shocking, reflection, will show us that the problems at the center of Sakta worship have been deep concerns in other religious traditions as well.

## Tantrism

A closely related form of religion called Tantrism arose in ancient times out of the same popular goddess worship from which Saktism was born. Tantrists often follow Sakta patterns in their public life. They are equally feminist in their theology. But Tantrism has moksa, or liberation, as its goal, and it is set off from Saktism by erotic ritual practices and by an elaborate yoga that is sexual in its concepts. Disdained by most Hindus, Tantrism is a marginal development with a small following.

## The Worship of Visnu

### Visnu in the vedic Age

The second of the two great bhakti traditions has long honored the name of the vedic Visnu and has taken into itself much of the lore of that kindly deity. The Visnu of the Vedas is associated with the sun and is seen as promoting growth. He is present in plants and trees, provides food, and protects unborn babies in the womb. He rides a sun-eagle, wears a sunlike jewel on his breast, and is armed with a discus (cakra) that is clearly the orb of the sun. But he is not the sun, and thus his jurisdiction is not limited to a single part of the natural world.

Although not a great god in the vedic pantheon, Visnu appealed to many in postvedic times because of his deeds on behalf of humanity. When Indra, accompanied by a host of gods, drew near

the mountain lair of the demon Vrtra, the gods fled in terror, but Visnu stood steadfast and helped release the waters that flowed down in seven beneficent rivers. The Brahmanas recount how Visnu assumed the form of a dwarf and went as a begger before Bali, the king of the demons, and asked as alms the gift of as much space as he could mark out in three steps. The demon granted him this favor. Visnu then resumed his cosmic stature and paced off in his first giant step the whole earth, as an abode for living persons. Then he marked off the atmosphere, and in the third step he established the high heavenly world as a pleasant refuge for the deceased. Visnu was the one god of the vedic pantheon who was known to care about the happiness of the dead.

The cult of Visnu attracted persons concerned about the problem of immortality and also those who had at heart the welfare of society. Visnu worship appealed to those who saw the nuiverse as friendly and good. Salvation seekers of the postvedic age who could not perceive the violent Rudra as their savior found and alternative in a great god who could be identified with Visnu. Vaisnava religion found its following among the more settled citizens and civil leaders of the Hindu world.

## Origins of the Vaisnava Tradition

The Vaisnava religion did not arise directly out of vedic circles that worshiped Visnu, however. Its institutional history began in the religious life of a tribal people called the Satvatas, who in the fifth century B.C. were already worshiping, in nonvedic rites, their special deity called Krsna Vasudeva. In its early phases, this religion was often called the Satvata faith after the tribe that professed it, or sometimes the Bhagavata faith because its great god was given the title Bhagavat, or Bounteous One. The standard term Vaisnava began to come into use in the first centuries of the Christian era.

It is in the Sanskrit grammar of Panini, composed about 400 B.C., that Krsna Vasudeva is mentioned first—already as an object of worship. A little can be learned about this deity and his worshipers in scattered references in the earliest warrior stories in the great Indian epic called the Mahabharata, which was beginning to be

woven together in that same period. The bards in these early epic stories refer to Krsna Vasudeva as a great chieftain of the Satvatas, and it is likely that this deity arose out of the fame of a once-living ruler. The early epic materials of about 400-200 B.C. remember Krsna Vasudeva as much more that human, however. For many he is the God of gods supreme ruler of the universe, worshiped not only by the Satvatas but also by other people who had been drawn into the Satvata religion. The Satvata tribe, which originally had held and undistinguished position on the lower fringes of Aryan society, had by means of military success attained ksatriya status in the eyes of most and had all but erased the memory of its plebeian origin. Established among the elite classes at the royal courts of north India, the worshipers of Krsna Vasudeva were in a position, after 400 B.C., to learn the Sanskrit language and its literature. For several centuries, however, they remained unsympathetic to the vedic sacrifices and showed no familiarity with the mystical religion of the Upanishads, and they made no apparent effort to explain the greatness of their God in terms of the infinite Brahman of the Upanishads.

Whatever the Satvatas' origin might have been, after 400 B.C. they became so powerful that they were able to approach the highest classes of Aryan society. In time they developed ties with the brahmans who served as priests to the nobility. Some brahmans became adherents of the Satvata faith and, as teachers, assisted the sect in establishing its simple monotheism upon the Upanishads' doctrine about the unification of the world in the Brahman.

The Bhagavadgita, a work of the second or first century B.C., is the literary product of India's first creative encounter between monotheistic and monistic religious traditions. It was received with such favor that it was incorporated immediately into the *Mahabharata* by the new brahman editors who were beginning to recast and enlarge that epic poem at that time.

**The Bhagavadgita**

The Bhagavadgita consists of eighteen cantos of Sanskrit verse which were integrated into the sixth book of the *Mahabharata* as a distinct unit. Often printed separately from the great epic, the

Bhagavadgita has become the most widely used of all Hindu scriptures. The kindly attitude of its unknown author toward non-Vaisnava forms of religion is one reason for the work's broad appeal. The Vaisnava author found positive values in other teachings and practices, and thus the text can be appreciated and used by millions who are not devotees of Krsna at all. But the principal reason for the wide acclaim that the work received at the time of its writing was its contribution to the solution of a critical social problem: the widespread abandonment of their social stations by young men who had become disenchanted with the life of this world. The deep concern of the ruling classes had been aroused by a massive response to the proposal of the late Upanishads and other religions of the time that citizens should seek liberation by renouncing the world and becoming hermits in the forest. The Bhagavadgita discusses this problem in detail.

The author knew the major Upanishads well and believed that Krsna himself had revealed them (15.15). He was inspired by their message that the universe had a metaphysical unity in the nonphenomenal Brahman, but the social message of the Upanishad religion, as it was being interpreted in his own time, dismayed him. He comments on the call to the ascetic life from the viewpoint of the Satvatas, who had just risen to responsibility for the welfare of the world and who were by no means disgusted with society or disillusioned with personal existence. Despite the author's view that all forms of Hinduism can be useful to some in the struggle for salvation, he does not regard all faiths as equally true and effective. Politely byt firmly, he subordinates the impersonal Brahman of the Upanishads to the control of a personal Lord, and with great emphasis he corrects current interpretation of the Upanishads' teaching about *sannyasa*, or renunciation. He insists that seekers of salvation need not and should not abandon the world and cease their worldly work. His method is an ingenious analysis of how the weaknesses of our acts damage us and an explanation of why external renunciation of the work of this world is not necessary for salvation.

The Bhagavadgita opens with a scene that illustrates the crisis of the age: A sensitive warrior is contemplating the grim duty that

Hindu society requires of his caste, and he recoils at the thought or the evils that will follow and of the guilt that its performance may entail. Arjuna, the despondent hero, it the chief reliance of the army of the Pandavas. He is bound by duty to fight the forces of the Kaurava prince, Duryodhana, who has committed great wrongs. But as Arjuna looks down the ranks of opponents he is expected to slay, he is moved by affection for the relatives and respected teachers whom he sees among them, and he reflects with horror on the injuries and disorder that his fighting would produce. Paralyzed by the thought of his dreadful duties, Arjuna drops his weapons and throws himself down in his chariot, saying it would be better to live by begging as monks do, than to commit such deeds (2.5). Confused about what is right, he asks for the advice of Krsna, who is serving as his chariot driver.

Although the duty of a warrior is discussed in this story, the case of Arjuna only epitomizes the moral problem of the members of every occupation. Krsna's message is as much a lesson for clerks, shopkeepers, and priests as it is for warriors. Must we, as the followers of the Way of Knowledge assert, abandon our worldly work with its imperfections and endless retributions if we aspire to liberation?

Krsna responded first with conventional arguments: Disgrace descends on all who flee their duties; in using arms no real harm is done, since the soul cannot be slain.In the second canto Krsna began to reveal the real reason why the duties of life need not be abandoned, and that is because they can be performed in a new spirit that prevents the acquisition of kamna and makes them a means of liberation rather than of bondage. Our desiresour greed or aversion, our longing or loathing-are what bind acts to us and make their impurity our own. If we can perform the duties of our stations simply because the scriptures require us to perform them or simply as a service to God, and with no desire to make any personal gains, then those acts will have no real connection with us in the iperation of the processes of retribution. No karma will be created by those acts, no ties with the world will be deepened by them, and no future births will ensue. After a life lived in the selfless performance of one's social role, the dispassionate soul, unfettered still despite a

fully active life, is forever freed.

Krsna explained that he himself as the Lord of the Universe creates and maintains the world in that desireless spirit: it is only to secure the welfare of the world that he carries on his eternal cosmic activity (3.20-25), and it is only to save the world from evil that he descends to mundane births age after age (4.5-15), and thus his work entails no bondage.

Human workers in the world can emulate that selflessness and share in that freedom. The renunciation that the scriptures require is not an abandonment of work-which we can never totally achieve so long as we must care for a body—but a renunciation of desires. Those who quell their desires achieve a calm that is not a mere state of the emotions but a metaphysical state of being. They attain Brahman, which is known mystically in human experience as a realization of lasting serenity (5.19 ff.). Those who know Brahman work in that serenity until the end of life, then pass quietly at death into everlasting peace, included in the eternal Brahman that is the Being of God (2.72).

Yet when Krsna at the end of the fourth canto called on Arjuna to rise and do his warrior's duty Arjuna still could not muster the resolve to do so Thereupon Krsna explained how we can employ the discipline of meditation to gain victory over desire. The heart of the Bhagavadgita's meditation is the purposeful upward redirection of our attention. We must no longer concentrate on sense objects, as is our innate tendency; rather, looking upward, we must focus our inward eye on loftier realities—the soul, the World Soul, Brahman, and best of all, the personal supreme Lord. Beginners in the faith can struggle for an awareness of God by such humble practices as meditating on Krsna's deeds and singing his praises, and can then move onward into deeper disciplines of meditation. The author knew advanced introspections like those of the eight-stage yoga and teaches them, but with important modifications: The genuine realization of Brahman will not come in preternatural luminous visions induced by restraint of breath, but rather in the experience of tranqility that arises from the elimination of desire.

The realization of Brahman is not an end in itself, as in the jnanamarga; rather, the realization of Brahman gives rise to a compassion for all creatures, a compassion born of the awareness of the metaphysical tie that unites all beings in a single essence, and it creates a capacity for a lifetime of desireless work. Finally, out of the realization of Brahman comes a recognition of our tie with God, the final means of salvation (18.54-56).

The eleventh canto of the Bhagavadgita relates how the reluctant Arjuna was finally moved to devote himself to the service of God by a vision of Krsna in his cosmic state. Overwhelmed by the revelation, Arjuna paid homage to Krsna and proclaimed him to be the be-all and end-all of existence, even greater than Brahman, and the source of duty itself (14.27). In the last canto the climactic development of the book is reached with Arjuna's pledge to Krsna, "I shall do your word!" (18.73). In return, Krsna assured him that sincere strivers could turn to him for refuge, despite their shortcomings, and that he would liberate them from all their sins (18.64-66).

By adapting the Brahman concept of the Upanishads, the author of the Bhagavadgita was able to give the simple religion of the Satvatas a way of explaining its monotheism by using a well-established Hindu concept of the universe as a whole. In the theology of the Bhagavadgita, the Brahman is, much as the Upanishads state to be, the single ultimate stuff of the universe. But this universal essence is not autonomous. It is God's world-stuff, an aspect of the divine Being that is transcended and controlled by an Intelligence. The Lord has priority over Brahman (14.27)and controls Brahman (13.12 ff.). Those who have attained Brahman by means of the Way of Knowledge have attained a condition that is divine, free, and lasting but they have not attained equality with the Lord, nor have they learned the final truth about his nature.

By entering into dialogue with vedantic learning, the author of the Bhagavadgita gave his sect a view of the universe that made it worthy of the attention of sophisticated perosns who knew the Vedas and other Sanskrit literature. He adapted to the needs of a social and ethical religion the meditational skills that the ascetics

had developed. By a positive appreciation of many other movements and sects, he created a meeting place for Hindus of many kinds. He offered to Hindu society, weakened by the alienation of its workers, an alternative to secession and parasitism, and he gave to all of Hinduism a beautiful devotional work of wide appeal. Finally, he laid the foundation for the transformation of his small sect into the most powerful tream of the bhaktimarga and into a major support of the brahmanical order of things.

**The Later Vaisnava Tradition**

The subsequent history of the Vaisnava religion centered on two kinds of developments: (1) the gathering of congenial groups around the original users of the Bhagavadgita and (2) the special responses of certain Krsna worshippers to pressures and needs that arose in later historical periods. During a history of two thousand years the Vaisnava tradition grew and became a great family of religions bound together by the common possession of the Bhagavadgita and a few other universally accepted scriptures.

**The Identification of Krsna With Visnu**

The author of the Bhagavadgita in a few subtle statements indicated that to him Krsna in his heavenly form was the vedic deity Visnu (11.24,30,46). In about 150 B.C. the sage Patanjali suggested the unity of Krsna and Visnu in his *Mahabhashya* (3.1.26) by mentioning religious dramas that recounted both the killing of Kamsa by Krsna and the binding of Bali by Visnu. At stake in these and other efforts to establish for Krsna a tie with the vedic god was the orthodoxy of Krsna's sect in the eyes of all other Hindus. The deciders of such claims were not the followers of the sect or the general population, but brahmans learned in the Vedas. By arriving at a consensus, such brahmans could retain or remove from a sect the taint of falsity of teaching. If Krsna, even under another name, were universally understood to have been mentioned in the Vedas, his worship could be deemed to be a form of vedic religion. Brahmans might then serve the sect as priests, and citizens might adhere to it without sacrificing their orthodoxy. Bhagavatism could be considered a revealed religion, and its scriptures could be accepted as smritis. In this case, full recognition came after five

hundred years of pressure and accommodation.

The first group of brahmans to be won over were those who, in the period of the later development of the *Mahabharata*, became its new reciters and revisers. In the materials of this later epic the identification of Krsna with Visnu was everywhere openly stated and accepted. The *Visnu Purana* of about the fourth century A.D. brings together in one book the myths of Krsna and of Visnu, marking a further consolidation of their cults. By the end of that same century, the wide use of the term Vaisnava in the general brahmanical literature showed that even the most hostile groups of brahmans had been won over. thereafter, only a few dared charge that the Vaisnavas were nonvedic. Respectability had been achieved, and the way had been opened for the full exercise of the great Vaisnava absorptive capacity.

But in that final settlement not only the brahmans made concessions. The Vaisnavas dropped the early Satvata hostility toward the vedic sacrifice and its priesthood, such as one finds in Bhagavadgita 2.41-44. They abandoned as well the tendency to exalt ksatriyas as religious leaders. Their one-time tendency to minimize the importance of caste ranking was carefully contained Brahmans and Vaisnavas together bacame the mainstay of the caste civilization.

**The Worshipers of Narayana**

Early in the expansion of the vaisnava faith a sophisticated sect called the Pancaratrins were assimilated. The Pancaratrins were committed to a monotheistic explanation of the origin of the universe, and had honored as Creator their sectarian deity whom they called Narayana. Identifying Narayana now with Visnu and with Krsna Vasudeva, the Pancaratrins ceased to exist as a separate sectarian community. The heritage of their speculations enriched this thought of general Vaisnava religion.

The Pancaratrins performed vedic sacrifices except those that involved the slaughter of animals. Their insistence on nonviolence contrasts sharply with the position of the Bhagavadgita, but on this point the worshipers of Narayana were able to dominate the union

into which they entered. Today, almost all followers of the Vaisnava faith are vegetarians, and the objection to animal sacrifices has spread beyond Vaisnava cricles until now very few Hindus justify the ritual killing of animals.

The Pancaratrins made three other significant contributions to their new faith: (1) a pious practice called japa (muttering), which is the continued repetition of the name of the Deity; (2) the reintroduction into the Vaisnava religion, for totally devoted persons, of a form of monastic life not dissimilar in apperance to that of the sannyasis of the Way of Knowledge; and (3) an expectation that as reward for their devotion to God, worshipers might receive an actual vision of the Deity. The hope for *darsana*, (a direct vision of God) is an important Vaisnava aspiration today.

**The Avataras**

One of the most distinctive and important of the Vaisnava ideas is that the deity descends to earth and is born there in earthly forms. The first appearance of this belief was in Bhagavadgita 4.6-8, in which Krsna spoke of his alternation between two realms:

*Though I am an eternal unborn Soul,*
*the Lord of Beings,*
*relying on my own materiality*
*I enter into phenomenal being*
*by my own mysterious power (maya).*
*Whenever righteousness declines*
*and wickedness erupts*
*I send myself forth, O Bharata [Arjuna].*
*To protect the good and destroy evildoers*
*and establish the right, I come into being*
*age after age,*

In the eleventh canto, in his awesome vision of the transcendent Lord, Arjuna addressed the Supreme Being as Visnu. Most Hindus hava always believed that the god who is the heavenly source of avataras should be called Visnu, and that Krsna Vasudeva may be counted among Visnu's avataras, or deseents.

The conception of avatara is not found in the Vedas; even the

essentials for its creation appeared later: the idea of a supreme deity, the idea of repeated births, and the idea of a metaphysical link between divine and human states. The Satvata tradition probably generated the avatara concept in order to explain how its object of worship, a wellknown human being, could also be divine. This doctrine supports the Vaisnavas' comparatively high appreciation of the value of worldly life and their faith in a kindly, world-concerned deity.

The number of the avataras has never been agreed on completely. *Mahabharata* 12.326.72-82 names seven and the *Bhagavata Purana* names twenty-two but adds that the number is really beyond counting. In the present millennium most Hindus have agreed in recognizing ten avataras, named in this order: Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana, Parasurama, Krsna, Rama, Buddha, and Kalki. Kalki, the then avatara, is yet to come. Pictured as a swordsman on a white horse, or as a horse- headed figure, he is to appear at the end of the present evil age to unseat from their thrones the wicked barbarian rulers of the earth and to restore the righteous brahmanical order. This concept of Kalki arose out of the revulsion of Hindu India, in the first three centuries A.D., to the long rule of foreign dynasties that were indifferent or hostile to the brahmans. Buddha, the ninth, is the founder of Buddhism and the one surely historcal personality in the list. Rama, the eighth of the series, is the hero of the Ramayana, an epic poem discussed later in this chapter. We already know much about Krsna, the seventh avatara. Parasurama, the sixth, may, along with Krsna and Rama, have been an actual person. He is said to have restored the supremacy of the brahmans by slaughtering the insubordinate ksatriyas with his ax (*parasu*). In the form of Vamana, the fifth avatara, Visnu recovered the word from the demons by his famous strategy fo the three steps. As Narasimha the Man-Lion, the fourth avatara, Visnu protected his devotee Prahlada from persecution by a demon, whom the avatara split open with his claws. As Varaha (the Boar), Visnu as the third avatara plunged into the sea and with his snout raised up the drowning world that lay submerged on the bottom, where it had been dumped by a demon. As Kurma (the Tortoise), the second avatara, Visnu during the great churning of

the ocean stood on the ocean bottom and provided a firm base for the churn by letting its spindle revolve on his back. In his Matsya or fish avatara, Visnu warned Manu of a coming universal deluge and pulled to safety the boat that Manu built. Thus all the avataras are conceived as benefactors of humanity.

Although the ten figures just named are recognized as divine by all traditional Hindus, only the Vaisnavas feel obliged to worship any of them, and among Vaisnavas it is customary to select a favorite avatara for personal or family worship. Currently, the worship of the Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, and Vamana avataras is rare. Neither Parasurama nor Buddha has ever attracted many Hindu devotees. Rama and Krsna, on the other hand, are now the most popular of all Hindu divinities. The Bengal Vaisnavas and some others deny the Krsna is an avatara of Visnu but believe, with some justification in the te aching of the Bhagavadgita, that Krsna Vasudeva himself is the supreme Deity and the source of all avataras. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries some reform movements, particularly the Arya Samaj, rejected as superstitious the entire list of avataras. Other strands of modern Hindu thought moved in the opposite direction, recognizing as avataras the extraordinary leaders of any religion, Hindu or non-Hindu.

## The Maturation of Vaisnava Thought

Slowly the literature expressing the Vaisnava outlook improved in intellectual quality and in time the Vaisnava doctrine gained acceptance as a form of the thought of Vedanta, one of the six honored systems of orthodox Hindu philosophy. Early in the Christian Era, a word called the *Vedanta, Sutra,* which attempts to summarize the teaching of the Upanishads, or Vedanta, was composed by an author named Badarayana. Most scholars now judge that Badarayana was a monotheist and believed in a personal Supreme Being. The Sutra's exact meaning is seldom clear, however, without a commentary. If Badarayana was indeed monotheist, then the *Vedanta Sutra* is the Vaisnavas' first systematic theology, since it covers all the major questions involved in a rounded world view. But Badarayana's convictionsn as expressed in this terse document can be variously understood.

There were ancient Vaisnava commentators whose works have been lost, but the oldest surviving commentary, written about A.D. 800, is the work of the great Advaita master Sankara, who alleged that the *Vedanta Sutra,* as well as the Bhagavadgita and the Upanishads themselves, teach that the ultimate Reality is the impersonal Brahman and that the worship of the personal God is based on a half-truth and is suitable only for the preliminary instruction of immature minds; According to Sankara, those who have matured spiritually realize that persons, human or divine, are not real, but belusions arising through a cosmic ignorance called maya.

Writing throughout a period of five hundred years, half a dozen Vaisnava scholars responded to Sankara's challenge and defended the Vaisnava understanding of the *Vedanta Sutra.* Their commentaries are foundational expressions of the theologies of the great medieval Vaisnava sects. Ramanuja, the first and possibly the greatest of these intellectuals, wrote in about A.D. 1100. He was not a hermit scholar, but the abbot and preceptor of a group who from at least the twelfth century were known as the Srivaishnavas. That community can hbe traced back to a wave of devotional religion that began to sweep over the Tamil country in the sixth century A.D. and to a succession of gifted Tamil poet- devotees called Alvars who then appeared over a period of about three hundred years. The Alvars were of any and every caste, or none. One was an outcaste, and one, Andal, was a woman.

The teachers of this movement took up residence at the island shrine of Srirangam, in the Kaveri River near present-day Tiruchchirappali. The abbots of that institution raised Vaisnava thinking to a new level of consistency and made it respectable in the Hindu world of intellectual discussion. Ramanuja, the fifth abbot, produced a full commentary on the Vedanta Sutra in which he criticized the theory that all plurality of things and persons has an only apparent reality, being nothing but the effect of a deluding factor called maya on an undivided universal consciousness.

If put into direct discourse, Ramanuja's examination of the monist argument would run as follows: Where does thsi maya that you

speak of-this creator of all plurality, ignorance, and evil- have its existence? Does it exist in Brahman? That is impossible for several reasons. Brahman is homogenous and can have within it no separace thing. Brahman is perfection and can have within it no evil thing. Brahman is knowledge and could accommudate ignorance within itself only by destroying tiself. Brahman is the Real and contains nothing that is not real; if maya exists in Brahman it is real, and its alleged products-personal beings, the personal God, and the plural world-are also real, as we Vaisnavas hole. Is maya then located outside Brahman? Outside of Brahman, the sole Reality, there is only nothing. If maya is nothing, it has produced nothing-not even the illusory world that you hold our world to be.

By these and many other closely reasoned arguments Ramanuja exposed weaknesses in the logic of Sankara's teaching and difended the Vaisnava belief in the reality of persons, human and divine. The divine, all-inclusive reality that the Upanishads call Brahman and describe as an omnipursent and onmipotent consciousness, Ramanuja declared to be no neuter reality but the personal Lord. For Ramanuja, Brahman was simply one of the many nemes of Krasn Vasudeva, a name that refers to him as the basis of all being.

Ramanuja's understanding of the nature of mystical experience and its place in the religious life is arepresentative Vaisnava view. Vaisnavas aspire to darsana, a "seeing," physical or pritiual, of the beautiful form of the Lord. In its lower grades darsana can be merely a reverential viewing of an image in a shrine. At a higher stage of contemplation, darsana can become a powerful inner vision exp-erienced in the course of devout meditative practices. Ramanuja's comment on this higher darsana is that it is not a direct perception of the Deity, but a subjective vision shaped out of recollections of one's previous experiences.It is not a direct means to salvation; rether , its importance is that it is a powerful generator of devotion, or bhakti, whcih is the last human step towerd salvation. Not all Vaisnavas of deity are subjective, but all followers of the bhaktimarga agree that final liberation does not arise from the power of such visions, but from the power of God,

who responds to the devotion that the visions can generate.

**The Cult of Gopala**

Our account of Vaisnava history has so far followed a central line of fairly homogeneous religion that evolved from models in the Bhagavadgit. We confront the real complexity of the Vaisnava movement, however, when we try to understand a mutation that occurred in the worship of Krsna with the fise of the cult of the youthful Krsna as Gopala the cowherd. Though no participant in this worship of Krsna as a cowherd boy repudiates the Bhagavadgit, the principal scripture of this group is the Bhagavata Purana, a work of the eighth or ninth century A.D.

The religion of the Bhagavadgita grew for four centuries after the time of its composition without producing any offshoots of radically new type and function. Though the resources for meeting many personal needs, it was esteemed of the causes of social disorganization. Broad in its religious sympathies and positive in its social message, it provided a spiritual rallying point during this time for Hindus who valued order and longed to realize it through the acceptance of brahman leadership and a caste structuring centered for a long time in the rich Indian lands ruled by dynasties of foregin origin-Greek, Scythian, and Kusana-who cared little for caste ideals. The joining of the Vaisnavas and the brahmans in a common cause was important in bringing down the foreign dynasties in the third century A.D. and in establishing a thoroughly Hindu social order.

The Gupta emperors (c.A.D. 320-c. 550) supported the caste hierarchy with the power of the state; the brahmans became the recognized arbiters of all social issues; and the emperors themselves often were followers of the Vaisnava faith. The Vaisnava religion thenceforth had few detractors, an became as securely established as the caste society. At this time of the final triumph of the restraints of caste, the worship of Krsna produced the dramatically new Gopala cult, with myths, metaphors, and preoccupations very different from those of the Bhagavadgita.

The Harivamsa Purana, written about A.D. 300, began the new

tradition. The author says in his introduction that he is writing in order to compensate for the omissions of the Mahabharata, which had failed to tell the whole story of Krsna and his family. Thenm the author proceeds to relate, along with stories of Krsna's ancestors, dozens of new stories about the early exploits and antics of Krsna, from his birth to his unseating of his wicked uncle Kamsa from the throne of Mathura. All are retold in the Visnu Purana, and again in the Bhagavata Purana in a full and favorite form. In a distinctive light- hearted mood, these tales tell of the child Krsna's impudence in stealing butter from his mother's pantry and evading punishment through alibis, and of his wheedling curds from the cowherrd women who were carrying their edible wares to market. In the accounts of Krsna's adolescence, his naughtiness takes a flirtatious turn. He teases the gopts (cowherd girls) shamelessly and does audacious things of excite their passion.(For further deatils of Krsna's amorous deeds, see the following box.)

During the period of Muslim domination in India, large sects of worshipers of the child Krsna were founded. They continue to have great following today. The followers of one sect are well known in the West, where they chant the name of Krsna in public places and are therefore often called the Hara Krishna people.

The religious practices of this faith center on contemplation of Krsna's *lilas*, or sports. The narratives of the tenth book of the *Bhagavata Purana* are read, recited, and sung, sometimes in Sanskrit but more often in vernacular versions. The escapades of Krsna that are described in that purana are enacted in an operatic style with dances in an unusual kind of miracle play, called the *Raslila*. To rehearse Krsna's lilas mentally and to envision them before the inner eye are the Gopala cult's equivalent of yoga. Krsna's devotees seek to obtain visions of their God in the course of private meditations, or at climactic moments of song and story in emotional religious assemblies. Mathura and Vrindaban, cities to Krsna, have become great centers of pilgrimage and retiremetn for those who wish to pursue the spiritual life in these ways.

**The Worship of Rama**

The tradition of Rama, the eighth avatara of Visnu, probably began

with the recollection of an actual human being. Rama's story was first written by Valmiki in about the fourth century B.C. Valmiki's accunt of Rama's carrier, called the *Ramayana* is a great Sanskrit epic poem that has been compared to the Odyssey. The *Ramayana* tells the story of Prince Rama of the northern Indian kingdom of Ayodhya, who fought a great war in the far south to rescue his wife Sita, who had been abducted by the demon Ravana. Valmiki's poen tells the tale in the spirit of heroic legend rather than of myth.

The five original books of the *Ramayana* were written when polytheism still prevailed in India, and thus there is no suggestion in the earlier materials of this epic that Rama is in any way identical with Visnu or is the one God. Rama is a folk hero, an ideal, warrior, and that is all. Several centuries later, an initial and a final book were added to Valmiki's five- book composition, and the *Ramayana* assumed its present seven-book form. In these two additions Rama became a figure of divine stature, infused with some of the essence of Visnu. The assertion of Rama's divine status has none of the tentative and exploratory character of the avatara idea as presented in the Bhagavadgita, and it is already clearly understood that the avataras descend to earth from Visnu. The worship of Rama, then, began around the time of Christ, somewhat later than the Bhagavadgita.

Unlike the story of Krsna, the life of Rama was not reworked in the puranas. Valmiki's fine literary narrative was from the beginning so complete and so popular that the writers of later Ramayanas (here a general term for any life of Rama) were constrained to follow Valmiki's basic plot and his delineation of the Ramayana's major characters. The *Ramayana* is, above all, a tale of an illustrious royal family whose members, almost without exception, manifested the Hindu ideals of exemplary behavior in the performance of their various social roles. Finally, Rama after many trials, returned to his own kingdom and ruled with model righteousness in a reign remembered as a golden age of prosperity and justice.

In the first centuries of the Christian Era, this widely appreciated story became a national treasure, nourished and loved by

Vaisnavas, non-Vaisnavas, and even non-Hindus, and the legend was carried to Java, Thailand, and Cambodia. Today also, the appreciation and use of the *Ramayana* extends far beyond the circles in which Rama is a principal focus of worship. Among non-Vaisnavas it is loved for its moral teaching, and to ardent Rama devotees, its moral concerns are more important than its theological ideas.

In the modern religion of northern India, Rama became popular through the *Ramcaritmanas* (The Mind-pool of the deeds of Rama), an inspired retelling of Rama's story in the Hindi language by a great poet named Tulsi Das, about A.D. 1575. Its popularity has pushed Saktism and Tantrism into retreat in northern India and has made the Hindi-speaking areas predominantly Vaisnava. Often called the Bible of North India, the *Ramcaritmanas* is the most widely read of all Hindi books. Even the illiterate learn Rama's story when local actors dramatize it annually at a great autumn festival called the Ramlila, in which the entire *Ramcaritmanas* is recited and enacted.

The relation between the cults of Rama and Krsna is one of mutual support. In heavily Vaisnava communities today, most of the people participate in the festivals of both deities, and the worship of Rama and Krsna has become loosely joined in a composite religion. With theological consistency, Vaisnavas can include both Krsna and Rama in their devotion, explaining that as different avataras of one and the same Deity, they are identifiable with each other and are not different objects of worship. It is the difference between these two deities, however, that enables Hindus to combine their worship. As moral beings seeking self-control and social order, Hindus worship Rama. As intellectual beings seeking reasoned understanding they turn to the thoughtful Bhagavadgita and to the systematic theologies of the Krsna cult. As emotional beings oppressed by the heavy restraints of Hindu social life, they worship Gopala Krsna, the carefree divine prankster.

Whether the faiths of the bhaktimarga can rightly be called monotheistic is an important question for some students of religions. We have used the term "monotheism" often in this

chapter. But it is also possible to consider these faiths to be polytheistic, inasmuch as both Vaisnavas and Saivas recognize the existence, as superhuman beings of such persons as Indra, Brahma, and the entire Hindu pantheon. But adherents of the Bhaktimarga explain that these devas are no more than a superior order of created beings who are only servants of the one uncreated lord. The joint worship of Rama and Krsna, however, again raises the question of polytheism, reminding us of the complementary worship of Indra and Varnua that prevailed in the vedic period. But this combined worship of Rama and Krsna entails a theory of various avataras of a single god that enables Vaisnavas to consider their devotion to be monotheistic, even though two figures are honored. Does the Vaisnava conception of the Divine being involve complexities of a different order from Christian belief in the existence of archangels and in distinctions within the Deity that attribute creation to the Father, guidance to the Holy Spirit, and salvation to the Son? Our difficulty in answering this question illustrates the general awkwrdness of any effort to describe Hinduism by using familiar but ill-fitting Western Judeo-Christian terms.

**Classical Music**

Daddy: Indian music can be broadly divided into two groups Hindustani music and Carnatic music. The Hindustani music originated in North India and has been influenced by Persian and Arabic cultures and also by Urdu language. The Carnatic (Karnatic) music on the other hand is the music of South India and is known as the classical music of India.

The Carnatic music has its roots in the ancient Hindu *Sama Veda* and has absolutely no Persian and Arabic influences. It is said this music was originally composed by *Gandharvas* (celestial beings) and their composition was called *Gandharva Veda*. But we have no proof of that, since nobody has ever seen a *Gandharva Veda*. Anyway, the last 6 chapters of *Natyasastra* written by sage Harata (330 A.D.) deals with music and it is said that some part of the music was written by the mythological saint *Narada*. The Carnatic music is very much associated with devotional songs to deities.

Very few instruments are used in this music and even if the instruments are used, they are used alone and they imitate the singing. *The music is based on seven letters,* SA, RI, GA. MA, PA, DHA. NI, These seven letters are mathematically improvised to make thousands of tunes named *Ragas* and cyclic rhythmic patterns known as *Talas.* One of the great exponent of the Carnatic music is Swami Thyagaraja (1767-1847) of Tanjore. His mother-tongue was Tamil but he composed his songs Telugu. Most of his songs are devotional songs to Lord Rama. It is said that Swami Thyagaraja has composed more than 2,000 tunes or melody types of Ragas in the Caruatic music. Lately, Carnatic music is becoming very popular after Indian movies started making film music to the tune of Carnatic music. The present-day centers of this music are the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Mysore and Andhra Pradesh.

**Code of Manu**

The Code of Manu is the ethical code written by sage Manu. Very little is known about *Manu.* In mythology, he is known as *Manu Svayambhuva.* The Code of *Manu* is known as *Manu Smriti* or *Manu Samhita* or Manava Dharmashastra. It is the earliest law book of Hinduism. It has twelve chapters and it has touched all facets of life such as respectful obedience to parents and teachers; repentance and confessions; performance of sacrifices; the sanctioning of wars; allowed and forbidden foods; Offences and penances.

One of the most important part of this Code (BOOK X) is the description of the popular caste system. Manu wrote "For the growth of the world. *Brahman* created *Brahmanas* (Brahmins—the priestly class), *Kshatriyas* (warriors), *Vaishyas* (traders) and *Shudras* (manual workers) from his face, arm, thighs and feet respectively." Manu placed Brahmins in a very exalted position and placed the low-caste in a demeaning position throughout his Code.

Regarding the duties of women (Book V), Manu wrote that a girl, a young woman or even an aged lady should not do anything independently, even in her own house. She should be protected by her father during childhood, by her husband during her youth, and

by her son during her old age. No sacrifice, vow or fast must be done by a woman without her husband. If a woman violates her duties in this world, after her death she will take birth as a jackal. Even beating of wife under certain conditions is allowed as per this Code.

Book I of this code gives a philosophical account of creation. Manu had stated very elaborately regarding the creation of the universe. At first the universe existed in the form of darkness and God created world, light and water, in that order. From water came out a golden egg and in that he himself was born as Lord Brahma (the god of creation). Then Lord Brahma created a Man and a Woman.

The Code of Manu also refers to the theory of reincarnation. Manu wrote: "Man obtains a life of motionlessness (plants etc.) as a result of the evil committed by the body. the life of birds and beasts because of the evil committed by the speech and the life of the lowest born because of the evil committed by the mind."

Books II, III, IV, V and VI describes the four stages in a man's life. They are *Kaumaram* (youth), *Garhastyam* (married life), Vanaprastham (life of a hermit) and Sanyasam (renunciate's life). During *Kaumaram* a man is supposed to be 100% Bramhachari (celibate). During the stage of Garhastyam he is supposed to marry a virgin girl from his own caste. When the man's Karma as the householder is completed and when he is aged, he is supposed to take refuge in the forest and lead a hermit's life and finally becomes a *Sanyasin*. Life as a *Sanyasin* involves surrender of one's free will to the will of God.

There is a story in Hinduism almost parallel to the story of *Noah's Ark*. According to the story in one of the early scriptures in Hinduism namely *Satapatha-Brahmana*, once when Manu was washing in the sea a fish came into his hands. The fish said: *Rear me, then I will save you from the floods.* First Manu could not believe himself buut later decided to obey the request of the fish. Manu first kept the fish in a jar. When it outgrew the jar, he put him in a pit. Later the fish outgrew-the pit and finally became a giant. Then the fish advised him to build a ship and warned him that a flood would destroy the entire world. Manu took the advice

of the fish and built a ship. This fish was the first avatar of Lord Vishnu, popularly known as *Matsya Avatar.* When the floods came, Manu entered the ship. The floods carried the ship to the top of the mountain. The flood carried off all the creatures, and Manu alone survived. After the waters receded, Manu went to the plains. It is said that here he began the work of restarting life for another 4,320,000 years (Time period for four *Yugas* namely, *Krita,* Treat, *Dvapara and Kali*). Hindus believe that this story of *Manu* will be repeated at the beginning of universe numberless times.

The name Manu means the Patriarchal Earth Ruler. Each Manu lives for a period known as *Manvantara* (Manu-period). According to mythology, a Kalpa (4,320,000 human years) consists of 14 Manu-periods or 14 *Manus.* The 14 *Manus* are: 1. Svayambhauva-Manu the law-giver, 2. *Svarochisha,* 3. Uttama, 4. Tamasa. 5. Raivata, 6. Chakshusha, 7. Vaivasvata. 8. Savarna, 9. Daksha-savarna, 10. Brahma-Savarna, 11. Dharma-Savarna, 12. Rudra-Savarna, 13. Rauchya, 14. Bhautya. As I said before, all these Manus come and go in never-ending cycles.

His concept of Time and his statement that Universe undergoes an endless cycle of birth and destruction interests me most. Manu defined Time thus: When eyelids move 18 times, the time elapsed is called *Kashta*; thirty *Kashtas* make one *Kala;* thiry Kalas make one *Muhurta*; thirty *Muhurtas* make a day and night.

With all due respect to Code of Manu, Daddy, don't you think his statements about woman are outright nonsense? How on earth, he could make a caste-system which is an outright disgrace to Hinduism?

I can very well understand your sentiments and let me explain in detail... Please understand through the Code of Manu, you are witnessing an evolving society taking grass-roots on the riverbeds of North India. So much of his Code is intended for the society of that period and it has nothing to do with the modern society we live in. Similarly, if you read Old Testament, Exodus, you will see statements regarding the treatment of slaves etc. We all know that you cannot treat anybody the way they treated slaves during the Old Testament times. As I told you earlier, history is part of every

scripture, so much so we should not hastily judge different statements in them. A society maturing out of dark ages is bound to make many mistakes.

All religions in the world have given *Man* an exalted position and provided *Woman* with a demeaning position. Please understand that at that point in history, women were the weaker sex emotionally as well as physically. Today nobody will ever even dream of making a statement like that. Remember, the most popular democracy of the world, India had a *woman* chief-executive and all of us throughout the world, are still proud of the departed Smt. Indira Gandhi. People may agree or disagree with her policies but all hats are off to her valor and capabilities. She is, as she wanted to be, the Joan of Arc of India.

Similarly. I have to admit that the *caste-system* is a disgrace to Hinduism. I don't think anybody with right mind supports caste system. It only helped Brahmin domination of lower castes as well as Hinduism and large-scale conversion of Hindus to Islam and Christianity.

Please also remember that Buddha did not acknowledge caste system, even the highest castes in India. So caste-system might have emerged from certain needs, but as time passed, it became a *Curse on Hinduism* than a *Blessing*. Gandhi once said: *If untouchability is a part of Hinduism, I will discard Hinduism.*

## Creation & Annihilation of Universe

According to Hinduism Brahman (The Absolute) alone is timeless. All the rest, which emerged from Brahman will change shape and form in time. Birth and death are part and parcel of creation. They are also a part of time.

According to the Code of Manu, the universe undergoes endless cycles of birth and destruction. As per Manu: "When the eyelids move 18 times, the time elapsed is called a *Kashta*; thirty *Kashtas* make one *Kala*; *thirty Kalas* make one *Muhurta;* thirty *Muhurtas* make a day and night."

Hinduism was influenced by Greek astronomy in its calculations of

time. The seven-day week was introduced in India by the Greeks and India started following it during the Gupta dynasty period (A.D. 320-480). The zodiac signs were also brought to India by the Greeks.

What is Brahma Muhurta? The time between 3 a.m and 6 a.m. is considered to be Brahma Muhurta. It is supposed to be the most auspicious time of the day. It is said that during this period of time all celestial beings take rest and there is very little thought activity in the ethereal world. As such, this period is considered the best time for meditation and for spiritual activities. It is said, any problem can be solved if you try to solve it during this period of time.

Time immemorial is measured in cycles called Kalpas. One Kalpa is 12,000 years for Devas — gods of Heaven, or one Kalpa is 12,000 divine years. One divine year is equal to 360 human years. So one Kalpa is 4,320,000 human years. After each Kalpa there is another Kalpa.

Each Kalpa is divided into four Yugas or ages. They are Krita, Treta. Dvapara, and Kali. Lord Krishna lived in the Dvapara Yuga. We are now in the Kali Yuga. At the end of Kali Yuga the universe will be destroyed by Pralaya (deluge) to start the cosmic creation once again. Things in the universe deteriorate from Yuga to Yuga. Krita Yuga is four times the length of Kali Yuga. Its length is 1,728,000 human years. Treta Yuga is three times the length of Kali Yuga. Its length is 1,296.000 human years. Dvapara Yuga is two times the length of Kali Yuga. Its length is 864,000 human years. Kali Yuga's length is 432,000 years.

One thousand Kalpas constitute a day for Lord Brahma and the same period constitutes a Brahma Night. After 100 Brahma years (each of 365 Brahma Days and Nights) Brahma changes or dies. As per legends, when one Brahma changes, a saint named Romesha (hairy saint) loses one hair. When he loses all the hairs in his body, he dies. When one Romesha saint dies, Sage Ashtavakra (eight-curves in the body) loses one curve. When he loses all the eight curves, he dies. *So time devours everything!*

To begin with, please do not say that we are "worried" about salvation. Do not even say that we are concerned about salvation. Will you ever say that the Mississippi river is worried or concerned about reaching the Gulf of Mexico? No, because you know that, as per the laws of physics, the Mississippi river has no other alternative but to seek and merge in the Gulf of Mexico as its final destination. It is the *nature* of the Mississippi river to flow into the Gulf of Mexico. The same ideology stands when explaining our nature of seeking salvation. The *individual soul* (Atman) by *nature seeks to reach the Absolute soul* (Paramatman). If you ask me, if it is purely instrumental, the answer is yes, it is instrumental. By our human will, we can delay or accelerate our soul's merging with the Absolute but we have no choice. According to the Bhagavad Gita, Yoga, or union with the divine or the Absolute is for all. As I said before, the only difference is the time factor between the best and worst among us. Some will attain salvation with this life and some will take millions of lives to attain salvation. Now coming back to the first part of your question, I think the naked truth of the instrumentality of the universe such as the repeated birth and death of the universe reaffirms the fact that the urge to seek salvation among us is purely instrumental or involuntary or natural.

As long as we feel pleasure or pain and as long as we feel that this physical body is the ultimate "I", we are not going to be content with life as it is. So the urge to seek "perennial happiness and peace" is inborn in all of us. Of course, this seeking of everlasting happiness and peace will definitely start on a trial and error basis. Remember, each time I brought you a toy, when you were a small boy, you felt you achieved all the happiness in the world. Look at you now. You feel a brand new sports car will give you all the happiness in the world. In a few years' time, when you have that car, you would like to have something else. What I said above is true regarding you, me and everyone else. This seeking of happiness in material objects will continue until we find *happiness and peace within ourselves.* All of us make may mistakes in our search of everlasting happiness and peace. The wise ones among us will learn with a few mistakes and others will repeat the same mistakes over and over again.

So it is in the nature of all of us to seek salvation and we have no choice. All of us are purely *instrumental.*

**Cow and Hinds**

When the Aryans settled in India, the cow was the only animal they had domesticated. It the Vedic age, cows were a real blessing to the community. Cows provided them with milk, butter and yoghurt. The dead cow's skin was used to make shelters and clothing.

So the community in the Vedic age was really indebted to the cow in many ways. This later made the community to look at the cow with devotion. Mythology speaks about a celestial cow named Kamadhenu which could grant and fulfil any wish. Lord Krishna was a cowherd and he spent most of his childhood and youth taking care of cows. As time passed, cows were looked upon as a symbol of motherhood. Even in the writings of Sage Manu, there are specific references to cows and he forbids the slaughtering of cows. The *Rig Veda 6-28 reads: "Cows are god, they seem to me to be Indra*—the god of hearen." Hindu society, especially those who belong to the Brahmin caste, is supposed to be vegetarian. To fanatic Hindus, cows are still everything. Of course, the majority of Hindus still avoid consuming beef, but they do not look down upon any person who consumes beef. Anyway, among the fanatic masses in India, the slaughtering of cows will be a very controversial issue for years to come.

# D

**Dadimunda**

Tutelary god. Singhalese Buddhist [Sri Lanka]. An attendant on the god Upulvan to whom he acted as treasurer. The guardian of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. His sacred animal is an elephant. Also Devata bandara.

**Daksa** (*skilled and able*)

Sun god. Hindu (Vedic and Puranic). The son of Brahma and Aditi. he is an *aditya* and demi-urge. His consort is Prasuti. and he is said to have had up to sixty daughters. He appears in contlict with his son-in-law Siva's as the main offender against Siva's consort Sati (accounted as one of his daughters), who was so insulted by Daksa that she committed suicide by jumping into a ritual fire. Siva took revenge by decapitating Daksa but later, after intercession from other gods, Brahma brought him back to life, giving him the substitute head of a sacrificial goat. Attributer: head of a goat. Also Prajapati.

**Danaparamita**

Philosophical deity. Buddhist. One of twelve *paramita* deities and a spiritual offspring of Ratnasambhava. Colour: reddish white. Attributes: an ear of rice and a banner with pearl.

**Dances of Gods**

Whatever is best and highly esteemed has been offered to the gods and given divine origin by the Indian wisdom. The divine origin of dance can be regarded as the higest possible homage ever paid to the art. The gods and goddesses not only take great delight in

dancing, drama and mime, but many of them are great dancers themselves. Right from Shiva, Vishnu, Krishna, Kali and through Indra, Ashvins to *Apsaras* and men can be traced the long tradition of this spontaneous and rhythmic force called dance. Man has been dancing since times immemorial, both in tragedy and ecstasy, before his gods and goddesses as an act of worship, devotion, homage and offering. The concept of rhythmic body movements as an all powerful symbol has always given Indian mind and imagination an uncomparable flight and height. For instance, by performing Tandava, Shiva accomplished the dissolution of the world. Tandava as a cosmic dance represents symbolically the destruction of the illusory world of maya of nescience.

**Dances of Shiva**

Shiva or Mahadeva, the third god of the Hindu Trinity, represents the destructive aspects and the third guna, the *tamas.* The other two gods of the Triad are Brahma and Vishnu. Shiva is Mahadeva and Ishvara in his creative aspect. His supreme powers are enshrined in the form of *lingam* or phallus. Of all the divine expressions, *lingam* is the most representative of the powers of regeneration and procreation. The *Lingam* coupled with the *Yoni,* the symbol of female life-force, or the female organ, is offered worship everywhere in India. Regeneration and dissolution are two sides of the same coin. One presupposes the other. As Nataraja, he is the Supreme Lord of dance and drama. Tandava reflect Shiva's violent nature as a stern judge and upholder of jutice and righteousness. He dances both in joy and sorrow as the god of rhythm and movement. But he performs his Tandava at the termination of an age. He is shown performing his dance in the cremation ground which symbolises the heart of a devotee, cleansed of ego and illusion by means of fire of knowledge, enlightenment and severe austerities.

Shiva is shown dancing either alone or with his consort Parvati or Devi. He goes to Himavat's house to seek his daughter Parvati's hand in marriage disguised as a dancer for fun. He approaches Mena, Parvati's mother clothed in red rags, carrying a horn in his left hand and a drum in the right and dances merrily in the courtyard. All the people of the town collected there at once to see

him dance so beautifully. They all get infatuated with his enchanting dance and sweet melodies. Mena, delighted beyond measures, shower on him precious gifts, but he is not satisfied until Parvati is bestowed upon him in alms.

One of Shiva's most remembered dances was performed at *Tillai*, now known as Chidambaram in Tamilnadu. There lived in the forest of *Taragam* ten thousand heretic rishis who did not believe in the existence of God and propagated that performance of work alone was sufficient to attain salvation. With the view to convert them to faith, Shiva went there disguised as a yogi and accompanied by Vishnu disguised as his beautiful wife, and the great Serpent Shesha. When they reached there, the heretic rishis got infatuated with the yogi's beautiful wife. The rishi's wives were seized with a passionate desire for the yogi, and it caused quite a chaos. The rishis suspected some foul play and sensing the danger they prepared a sacrificial fire, and from it created a fierce tiger which sprang upon Shiva to devour him. But without much effort he killed the tiger with his little finger, pulled off its skin and threw it around his waist as a mantle. Then the rishis created a huge serpent which Shiva wore round his neck for a garland with a smile and began his famous dance. The *rishis* continued with their invocations and incantations and created a malignant dawarf *Muyalagam* with a huge club. Shiva crushed the hideous creature under one of his dancing feet and reduced it to a writhing pulp. He continued his victory dance on the back of the vanquished dwarf and all the gods and goddesses appeared there to witness the bewitching performance. The *rishis* overawed by Shiva's dance, and Shiva's true identity being revealed to them, they threw themselves at his feet and became his ardent devotees.

Ati-shesha, the great serpent, was so enchanted with the mystic dance of Shiva that he longed to see it again. He retired to forest to practice austerities and severe penance to obtain Shiva's blessing and boon of witnessing the same mystic dance again. Shiva appeared before him with Parvation their Nandibull; pleased with his devotion and ascetic practices Shiva said, "Go and reside at Tillai in human form born of mortal parents and there shall come a time when the ceaseless and eternal dance shall be revealed to

thee''.

Commenting on this episode sister Nivedita and Ananda Coomaraswamy in their book *Hindus* and *Buddhists* say, ''The above is but one of many legends of Shiva's dance. The dance itself represents the activity of Shiva as the source of all movement within the universe and especially his five acts, creation, preservation, destruction, embodiment and release; its purpose is to release the sould of man from illusion. It is frequently emphasized that the place of dance, the sacred shrine of Tillai or Chidambaram, is in reality within the heart; the human soul attains release when the vision is beheld within itself. It will be seen that Shiva has many forms, ''evil'' as well as ''good''. This must ever be so if we are not to postulate a separate ''devil''. As dances in the burning ground, the most terrible and unclean of places, he is essentially a pre-Aryan demon; he is also ''The Terible'' and ''The Destroyer''. Later Shaivate thought makes effective use of this dramatic imagery, not merely arguing that demons also must be a portion of God, nor simply transferring the place of the dance to the sacred shrine at Chidambaram, but accepting the dance as it is, and finding a new meaning in the cremation ground, the heart of the devotee, waste and desolate, the place where the self and its deeds are burnt away, and all is destroyed but the dancer himself''.

As promised to Ananta, the Ati-shesha, Shiva set out again for Tillai. There Ananta and Shiva's other numerous devotees longed for his vision and mystic dance, but he was stopped on the outskirts of the town by Kali, his consort. She had installed herself in his place and refused him entry. Finally, a way out was found and it was agreed to hold a dance competition and that only the conqueror would remain on the scene. The competition began but both remained unvanquished. They thrilled and transported the spectators with their enchanting dance poses, postures and recitals, but then Shiva resorted to a prank to outwit his so formidable a rival. He adopted a dancing stance, so outrageous in modesty that she could hardly bear to look at it let alone performing or emulating it. Consequently, she withdrew from Tillai. The temple of Nataraja at Chidambaram still bears witness to these two dances, known as *Ananda* and *Urdhva Tandava*, in the form of sculptured

*Karanas*, the very alphabets of Indian classical dance. The South Indian bronzes of Nataraja are a replica of dancing Shiva at Chidambaram.

Commenting on this image of the King of the Dance Grousset beautifully writes-

"Whether he be surrounded or not by the flaming aureole of the *tiruvasi* (*prabhamandala*)—the circle of the world which he both fills and oversteps—the King of the Dance is all rhythm and exaltation. The tambourine which he sounds with one of his right hands draws all creatures into this rhythmic motion and they dance in his company. The conventionslized locks of flying hair and the blown scarfs tell of the speed of this universal movement, which crystalized matter and reduces it to powder in turn. One of his left hands holds the fire which animates and devours the worlds in this cosmic whirl. One of the god's feet is crushing a Titan, for "this dance is danced upon the bodies of the dead, yet one of the right hands is making the gesture of reassurance (*abhayamudra*), so true it is that, seen from the cosmic point of view and *sub specie aeternitatis*, the very cruelty of this universal determinism is kindly, as the generative principle of the future. And, indeed, on more than one of our bronzes, the King of the Dance wears a broad smile. He smiles at death and at life, at apin and at joy alike, or rather, if we may be allowed so to express it, his smile is both death and life, both joy and pain...From this lofty point of view, in fact, all things fall into their place, finding their explanation and logical compulsion. Here art is the faithful interpreter of the phillosophical concept. The plastic beauty of rhythm is no more than the expression of an ideal rhythm. The very multiplicity of arms, puzzling as it may seem at first sight, is subject in turn to an inward law, each pair remaining a model of elegance in itself, so that the whole being of the Nataraja thrills with a magnificent harmony in his terrible joy. And as though to stress the point that the dance of the divine actor is indeed a sport (*lila*)—the sport of life and death, the sport of creation and destruction, at once infinite and purposeless-the gesture of the *gajahasta* (hand as the elephant's trunk). And lastly as we look at the back view of the statue, are not the steadiness of these shoulders which uphold the would, and the

majesty of the Jove-like tike torso, as it were a symbol of the stability and immutability of substance, while the gyration of the legs in its dizzy speed would seem to symbolize the vortex of phenomena?''

**Dances of Kali**

Besides the dances of Shiva, those of Kali, the stark naked, dark and fierce goddess of pestilence and destruction who receives blood sacrifices, are equally significant. She is also the recreative life-force, and in this aspect she represents the power without which no creativity, whether spiritual or physical is possible. As Kali, whe represents all the forms and forces that destroy evil and promotes good and well-being of the world. In this fierce form, she once killed the Demon Daruka, the tormentor of gods and their overlods and performed a frenzied dance which grew violent and still violent till the world could not bear it and the whole world became sick with its rage. Then, Shiva took the form of a boy by his *maya* and began to weep and cry aloud in the cremation ground full of ghosts and goblins. When she saw the child thus crying and howling, she took it up and offered him her breast to9 suckle. The illusory child drank up her fury with the milk and she was ultimately weaned of her violence and anger. Then Shiva performed a frenized tandava to win her favour, accompanied by his various ganas, ghosts and goblins. Delighted to the extreme with Shiva's nectarean dance recital, the supreme goddess Kali herself danced with joy in the burning ground. All the gods together with their king Indra and creator Brahma bowed before Kali and recited her praises.

On another occasion, Shiva mingled himself among the demons whom Kali was butchering and allowed himself to be trampled upon to assuage her wrath. Having killed the demon Raktavirya, she began her violent victory dance which nothing could contain. And so Shiva had to ressort to this trick.

The dances of gods and divine beings have inspired all these ages the numerous dancers and other artists. The scintillating and picturesque dances of Krishna, the incarnation of Vishnu, are equally important. Krishna is one of the most significant dancing

divinities of the Hindus. His supreme divinity finds expression in many works of literature, painting, sculpture and dance recitals. As the manifestation of the Supreme Being, he delivers the message of Bhagvad Gita to Arjuna. In this sacred treatise he enumerates the circumstances which necessitates the descent of Vishnu—Whenever Dharma declines, and unrighteousness flourishes, then I incarnate Myself, O Bharata.

I incarnate age after age,

for the protection of the good, and

for destruction of the wicked, and

for re-establishment of Dharma.

**Dances of Sri Krishna**

Sri Krishna, born to the royal couple Vasudeva-Devaki in prison in Mathura, was brought up by Nanda and Yasoda in Gokula. Thus transplanted, he grew up in sylvan surroundings of Brindaban playing with simple-sould cowherds and milkmaids. Gradually he grew into a handsome youth and was beloved of all. He played on his bamboo flute and performed many captivating adventures. One day he came to Vrindavana accompanied by Balrama and played there in the company of Gopis, the cowherds on the banks of the river Yamuna. There in a pool lived the wicked and hideous hundred- hooded serpent *Kaliya,* a veritable menance to the simple folk. He had turned the water of the pool into a mass of burning poison, and the whole Yamuna got polluted.

Krishna recognising the plight of simple folk thought of taming the evil-souled serpent and at once jumped into the pool, and then ensued a fierce fight, Krishna, remembering his divine powers, bent d( wn the heads of Kaliya with both his hands and mounted the central one and began to perform his *Tandava Dance.* Krishna jumped violently from one to another till the monster fainted away with shiver, vomitting blood because of Krishna's severe blows. When Kaliya came to senses again, he begged Krishna's forgiveness and mercy and prayed that his life may be spared. Krishna took pity on him and ordered him to leave the pool at once

for good and retire to the ocean along with his family. Kaliya bowed in obeisance and retired to the ocean. The evil serpent having departed, the cowherds and cowgirls heaved a sigh of great relief and over-whelmed with joy embraced Krishna again and again. They shed tears of joy and lauded Krishna in many a song. Having vanquished Kaliya, performed tandava and lauded by the cowherds and praised by the womenfolk, he returned to Gokula. Unlike Shiva's *tandava*, this fierce and violent dance of boy Krishna, symbolises that aspect of divinity which subdues and annihilates the evil forces opposed to dharma, righteousness and upright living.

Krishna, the supreme dancer and amorous adventurer of the many *puranic* texts, played *rasa-lila* with the *gopis* is general and Radha in particular One day Krishna ran across the gopis bathing in the river Yamuna. Bewitched by Krishna's celestial beauty they were calling out his name while bathing Krishna stole their clothes and climbed up a tall Kadamba tree. The *gopis*, trying to hide their naked bodies in the water, prayed and pleaded with Krishna, but he did not relent and asked them to come out one by one to the tree to receive their garments back. They had no alternative but to obey him. Finally, to assuage their enraged feelings of modesty, he promised to have a dance with them in the coming autumn.

When the autumn season came, one full moonlit night Krisnna came to the forest and called the *gopis* by playing on his magic flute and they came rushing, having abandoned their homes to where Krishna was. Krishna teased the *gopis* with his many a youthful prank and then engaged himself in dance with the love-distracted cowgirls. He took each of the gopis by the hand and formed a circle and the *rasa* began. Krishna sang, the *gopis* followed or simply sang Krishna, Krishna to the melodious tune of their tinkling ornaments, pipes, cymbals and *mridangas*. He himself played on flute. They danced as if in a trance in a circle with their hands interlocked. Govinda was in the centre of the circle and also between each of two cowgirls. The milkmaids danced deliriously in gay abandon and dallied with Madhava and though they had possessed Madhava solely as their own. But then suddenly Govinda slipped away with one of them, and later it was

revealed that she was Radha, the symboy of pure spiritual love and devotion. Krishna left them to break their pride.

When the *gopis* found themselves left alone, they began to cry and ran in all directions to search him out. Finally, they found out his foot prints along with those of Radha. While the *gopis* distracted and smitten with the arrows of love lamented and wailed Krishna's separation, Radha was full of great bliss and regarded herself the most highly blessed. She felt too proud to be so singled out, and so asked Krishna to carry her on his shoulders. But annoyed at her pride, Krishna instantly disappeared leaving Radha alone weeping and wailing.

The *gopis* found Radha, and they all began their search afresh. In the dense forest they could not continue their search farther. They sat down in the sands of Yamuna, talked of Krishna till they almost swooned smitten with love for him. When they came a little to their senses again, they tossed on the sand calling his sweet names. Realising *gopis*' plight Krishna appeared there and at their appeals and entreaties, he relented, and they began to dance again. Krishna made himself manifold with his power of maya (illusion), and danced and played with each of them in the circle wnile their armlets, braceletsand anklets tinkled merrily. They danced and dallied on the banks of Yamuna in the soft moonlit night made fragrant with flowers and the breeze laden with sandal scent. The cuckoos sang and bees buzzed, and the Braj-maids played on lutes. It was so rapturous that time and all sense of body and mind were totally forgotten. The dance, dalliance and whirl continued for six months with dark Krishna in their midst. The Braj-balas satisfied and fulfilled returned to their respective homes and no one knew they and been there away from their hearths and homes. And Jaideva sings of it inspired, eroticlly and ecstatically-

Yellow silk and wildflower garlands lie on dark sandal oiled skin.
Jewel earrings dangling in play ornament his smiling cheeks.
Hari revels here as the crowd of charming girls

Revels in seducing him to play.

One cowherdess with heavy breasts embraces Hari lovingly.

And celebrates him in a melody of love.
Hari revels here as the crowd of charming girls.
Revels in seducing him to play.

Another simple girl, lured by his wanton quivering look,
Meditates intently on the lotus face of Madhu's killer.
Hari revels here as the crowd of charming girls.
Revels in seducing him to play.

A girl with curving hips, bending to whisper in his ear,
Cherishes her kiss on her lover's tingling cheek.
Hari revels here as the crowd of charming girls.
Revels in seducing him to play.

Eager for the art of his love on the Jumna river bank, a girl
Pulls his silk cloth toward a thicket of reeds with her hand.
Hari revels here as he crowd of charming girls
Revels in seducing him to play

Hari prasises a girl drunk from dancing in the rite of love,
With beating palms and ringing bangles echoing his flute's low tone.
Hari revels here as the crowd of charming girls
Revels in seducing him to play.

He hugs one, he kisses another, he caresses another dark bearty.
He stares at one's suggestive smiles, he mimics a willful *girl.*
Hari revels here as the crowd of charming girls
Revels in seducing him to play.

The wondrous mystery of Krishna's sexual play in Brindaban forest
Is Jayadeva's song. Let its celebration spread Krishna's favors!
Hari revels here as the crowd of charming girls
Revels in seducing him to play.

When he quickens all things

To create bliss in the would,

His soft black sinuous lotus limbs
Begin the festival of love
And beautiful cowherd girls wildly

Wind him in their bodies
Friend, in spring young Hari plays
Like erotic mood incarnate.

Winds from sandalwood mountains
Blow now toward Himalayan peaks,
Longing to plunge in the snows
After weeks of writhing
In the hot bellies of ground snakes.
Melodious voices of cuckoos
Raise their joyful sound
When they spy the buds
On tips of smooth mango branches.

The path of *bhakti* or devotion is the path of love and total surrender, body, soul and mind. The devotion of the *gopis* with Radha at their head represents the divine love, pure and simple. It reflects the yearning of the human soul to merge into the Universal Soul. Commenting on this episode of *Raslila* and its real meaning Swami Vivekananda has said—

"Ah, the most marvellous passage of his life, the most difficult to understand, which none ought to attempt to understand until he has become perfectly chaste and pure—that most marvellous expansion of love, allegorized and expressed in that beautiful play at Brindaban, which none can comprehend but he who has become mad with, and drunk deep of the cup of love! Who can conceive the throes of the love of the *Gopis*—the shepherd girls— the very ideal of love, love that wants nothing, love that even does not care for heaven, love that does not care for anything in this world or in the world to come?

"The historian who records this marvellous love of the *Gopis* is one who was born pure, the eternally pure Suka, the son of Vyasa. So long as there is selfishness in the heart, so long is love of God imposible; it is nothing but shop-keeping.

"Oh for one, one kiss of those lips! One who has been kissed by Thee-his thirst for Thee increases forever, all sorrows vanish, and he forgets love for everything else but for Thee and Thee alone.

Ay, forget first the love of gold; and name and fame, and for this little trumpery world of ours. Then, only then, will you understand the love of the Gopis, too holy to be attempted without giving up everything, too sacred to be conceived until the soul has become perfectly pure. People with ideas of sex, and of money, and of fame, bubbling up every minute in their hearts, daring to criticize or interpret the love of the *Gopis*!

"That is the very essence of the Krishna incarnation. Even the Gita, the great philosophy itself, does not compare with that madness, for in the Gita the disciple is taught slowly how to walk towards the goal, but there is the very ecstasy of enjoyment, the drunkenness of love, where disciples and teachers and teachings and books, and even the ideas of fear and God and heaven-all these have become one. Everything else has been thrown away. What remains is the mad transport of love. In complete obliviousness to all else, the lover sees nothing in the world except that Krishna, and Krishna alone, for the face of every being has become a Krishna and his own face looks lik Krishna. and his own soul has become tinged with the Krishna colour...That indeed was the great Krishna."

**Dance of Heavenly Nymphs**

*Apsaras*, the dancing girls of Indra's court liver in Amravati, the capital of gods and goddesses located on Mount *Meru*. They display their dancing excellence before gods on the occasion of festivities and victories. The are physically very attractive and capitvating and follow their master Kama Deva. They are also called "the daughters of delight" because they were produced incidentally at the churning of the milk-ocean. Their beauty not withstanding, nor gods demons accepted them as their wives, and so they were made the wives of all and celestial courtesans. As skilled dancers and musicians, they symbolise delights and joys of heaven. They alone of the heaven are capable of falling in love with mortals on the earth, and are sometimes punished by Indra for this transgression. They are sent by their king Indra to entice, seduce and cause the fall of the great *rishis* and ascetics. They can change their shapes at will. Urvashi; Menka, Rambha and

Tilottama are the most famous and are adept in the art of music and dancing. Beautiful and voluptuous, they are the consorts of Gandharvas. Their dance is essentially laya type. In the Ramayana they have been described as under:

"The from the agitated deep up sprung
The legion of *Apsarases*, so named
That to be watery element they owed
Their being. Myriads were they born, and all
In vestures heavenly clad, and heavenly gems;
Yet more divine their semblance, rich
With all gifts of grace, of youth and beauty.
A train in numerous followed; yet thus fair,
Nor god nor demon sought their weded love;
Thus Raghava! they still remain—their charms
The common treasure of the host of heaven."

**Dances of India**

Indian dances are not simply thing of legs and limbs, but of the whole body and soul. Our classical dances are highly developed and stylized and so have changed little in their technique etc. through all these centuries. They strictly adhere to the principles and rules laid down by Bharata Muni in his Natyashastra ages ago. They. along with our variegated folk- forms, present a panormic and spectacular view of a splendid and continuous dance-tradition of India. Their history, sprawling from the pre-historic antiquity to our own days, makes a fascinating reading.

In recent years Indian dances have been much popularized and promoted through varous governmental, social and private agencies and institutions. Various folk and classical dance festivals and recitals held from time to time in Delhi, other cities and temple towns offer a good opportunity to witness and relish different dance-forms which otherwise would have been an impossibility. But their proper appreciation has been lagging far behind. The present book is a modest attempt in this desired direction. It is primarily meant to help the lay readers and lovers of Indian dance-forms to further expand and widen the horizon of their appreciation and consciousness of this art-form.

**Dancing Limbs**

As has already been mentioned, Bharat Muni's Natyashastra is the ancient most scripture of dance, drama and music. These three sister arts are interdependent, inseparable and overlap each other. The Natyashastra divides the art of dancing into three categories–1. nritta, 2. nritya, and 3. natya.

1. *Nritta* aspect of Indian classical dance is a pure, abstract kind of dance which depends for its life breath on rhythm, tempo, posture and accompanying music. It is without theme, without story or narrative. In *nritta* even gestures, mudras, rhythms, and limb movements do not convey any specific meaning, mood or message. It represents a pure and abstract dance technique and its strength lies in joyous and gay abandon and ecstasy derived from visual images in space and time through poses, stances and intricate footwork but without any themetic content. In other words it is a sequence of abstract and pure rhythmic movements without a story-content

2. *Nritya* on the other hand is the aspect of the dance performed to convey a definite idea, message or meaning. In essence it is expressional and possessed of *rasa*, *bhava* (mood) and suggestions. It draws its life-breath from the rhythmic movements of the body and limbs together with facial expressions. Being concerned with communicating an idea, message or story, it makes the fullest possible use of abhinaya, that is, facial expressions coupled with codified egestures of the hands and posture of the body. It gives due consideration to a narrative, aiming a conveying or suggesting an idea or story. These elements make it more comprehensive and embracing than *nritta*. The underlying technique of *abhinaya* in nritya is the same as in the *natya* or acting for the dancer uses his body and limb movements combined with music and literary narrative to send across to the spectators an idea, episode, story or a message. Here is a theme, a literary composition, set to music which the dance represents and interprets through his dance sequence. The theme of a *nritya* may be erotic, epic, religious or secular. Thus in *nritya* a literary theme is used as a basic component and raw material. In other words a nritya interprets a

story in rhythmic movements what music does in sounds. It is a dance with mime, abhinaya and a theme.

*Natya*, the third aspect, combines the components of spoken word or acting with that of nritya, that is, facial expressions, body and limb gestures and poses. The element of drama, in the form of spoken word, makes natya the most comprehensive of the three. Natya uses all the element of *abhinaya* which are angika, satvika, vachika and aharya. Angika abhinaya makes used of rhythmic body and limb movements, while satvika abhinaya consists of the various facial expressions reflecting the interplaly of emotions, feelings and moods. The spoken word in the form of a dialogue or a song come under *vachika abhinaya. Aharya* consists of expressional use of costumes, adornments and such other things.

It may be noted that Acharya Bharata in his Natyashastra uses the term 'Natya' to signify both acting and dancing. He visualized dancing and drama as interdependent sister arts, and an actor was supposed to be an accomplished dancer as well and vice versa. The principles and techniques of dance are the same as those of drama. Dance formed an inseparable part of drama and acting. Bharata conceived of these as two aspects of the same organic whole. Therefore, Natyashatra is the scripture of both acting and dancing. The different facets of drama have intimate points of contact with those of dramaturgy and acting. Thus he uses the word' Natya' as a common and collec tive term for both acting and dancing.

## Tandava and Lasya

*Nritya* is further divided into two classes—Tandava and Lasya. *Tandava* shows the fanatic and violent aspects of Indian classical dance. A *tandava* dance is basically masculine and vigorous, however, it is a generic name and by no means signify a dance to be performed by males alone as it refers to a kind of dance and not to the male or female performer. A danseuse may equally excell in tandava dance as a man may in *lasya.*

*Tandava* is associated with Shiva and his gana Tandu, while lasya is associated with Parvati, the consort of Shiva. Tandava is generally performed before the gods on the occasion of their

adoration, etc. *Lasya,* opposed to the boistrous and masculine dance of Shiva and his follower, refects the tender emotions of love. Obviously, Parvati is said to be its orginator. Parvati taught it to Usha, the daughter of Vaṇa and wife of Aniruddha. *Lasya* is scharacterized by tender or delicate and calm rhythmic movements, music and emotions juxtaposed to fierce, orgiastic and violent and yet so sublime *tandava.*

Not unlike music, Indian dance has changed little through all the centuries and the dancers perform their dance recitals according to the traditional precepts enshrined in Bharata's Natyashastra. Indian dances involve the whole body of the artist. The eyes, face arms, hands, fingers, neck, waist, legs and feet make their vital contribution and must be well controlled and used rhythmically to interpret and represent an idea or story. Nandikeshvara in his famous treatise *Abhinaya Darapana* (the Mirror of Gesture) describing the physical appearance of danseuse says, "It is understood that the Danseuse (*nartaki*) should be very lovely, young, with full round breasts, self-condident, charming, agreeable, dexterous in handling the critical passages, skilled in steps and rhythms, quite at home on the stage, expert in posing hands and body, graceful in gesture with wide open eyes, able to follow song and instruments and rhythm, adorned with costly costly jewels with a charming lotus face, neither very stout nor very thin, nor very tall nor very short." And the danseur should be "handsome, of sweet speech, learned, capable, eloquent, of good birth, learned in the scriptures (*shastras*) of art and science, of sweet voice, versed in song, instrumental music, and dancing, self-confident, and of ready wit." A danseuse must possess "swiftness, composure, symmetry, versatility, glances, ease, intelligence, confidence, speech and song". They constitute their "Inner Life".

The disqualifications of danseuse include pale eyes like a flower, scanty hair, thick lips, pendant breasts, very thin or stout figure, very all or short stature, bad voice, humped back etc.

It may be mentioned that next to Natyashastra, Abhinayadarpana of Nandikeshvara is the most important work on Indian dancing and acting.

## Mudras or Gestures

In dancing *angikabhinaya* or gestures of the body and the limbs play an important part. Of these the hand-gestures called *mudras* play a very crucial role. By a beautiful and codified *mudras* even very complicated ideas can be conveyed and emotions portrayed. A *mudra* may be defined as a particular position or the intertwining of fingers. These *mudras* are also used in religious worships and iconography as they are supposed to have an occult meaning and magical efficacy. *Mudras* involve an intricate finger manipulation and movement of the hands to suggest different ideas and meanings: the birds, animals, trees, flowers, a deity, a fruit, ragas, planets, meditation, lifting of a mountain, a flame and the like. The *Natyashastra* mentions thirtyseven such *hasta- mudras* and ten of the body besides thirty six of the sye and nine of the neck. With the various combination of these, a dancer can portray a whole of the epic to an initieated audience who knows how to decode and interpret these. In this respect these texts lay down specific rules in



*Kángula*



*Chatura*



*Bhramara*



*Tamarachuda*



*Suchimukha*



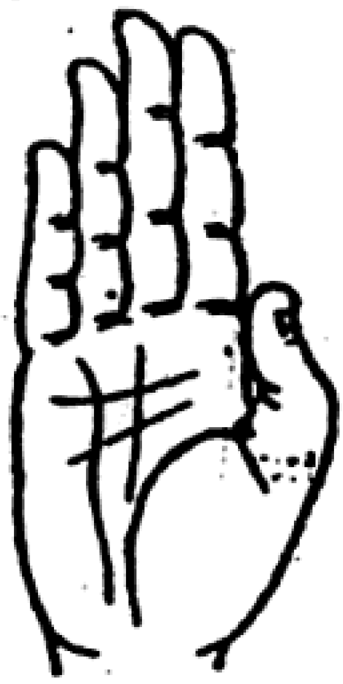
*Padmakosha*



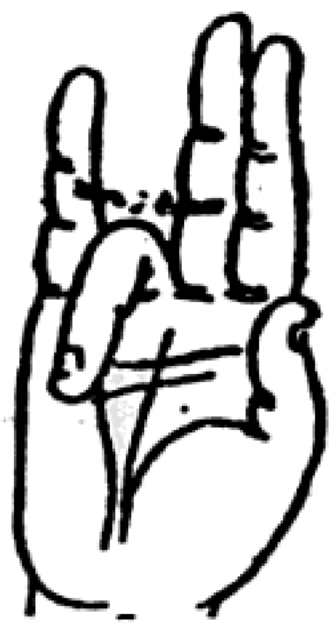
*Sarpashirsha*



*Mrigashirsha*



*Pataka*



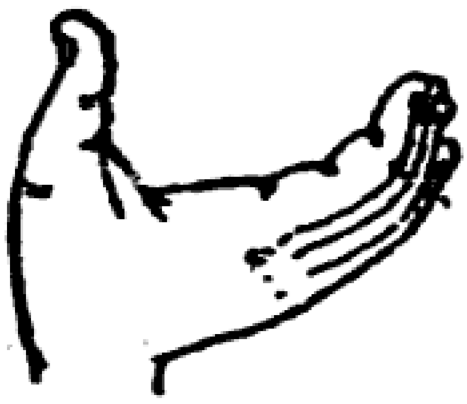
*Tripataka*



*Kartarimukha*



*Aral*



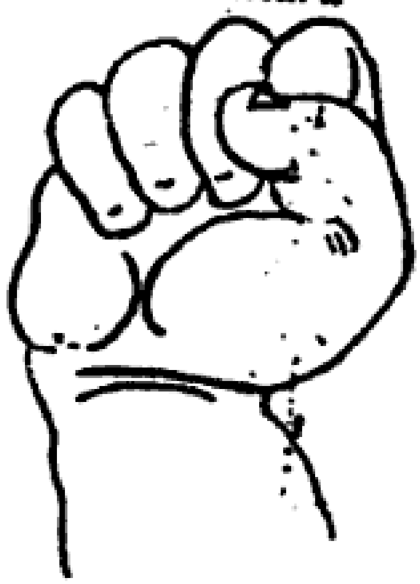
***Ardhachandra***



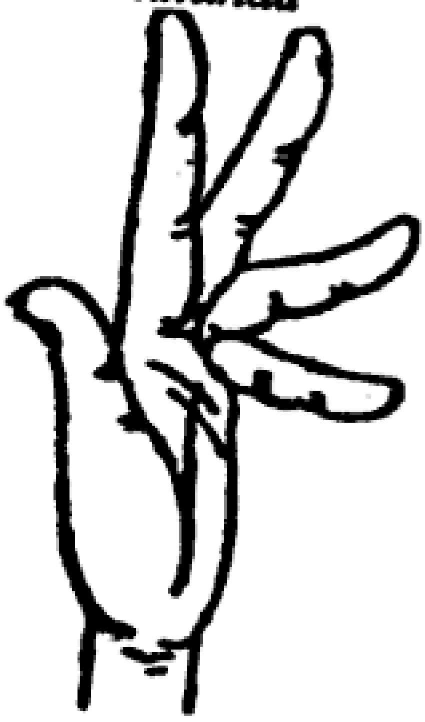
***Shikhara***



***Shukatunda***



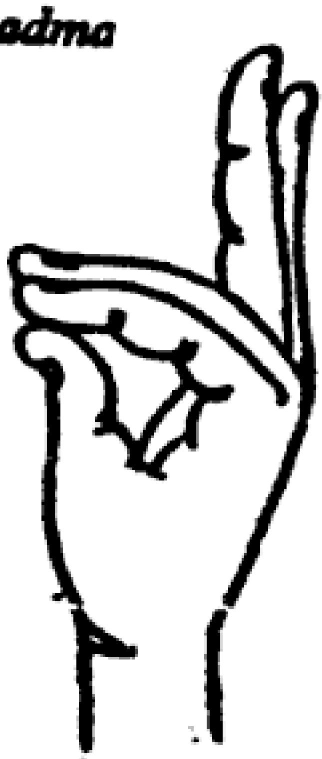
***Mushti***



***Alapadma***



***Urunabha***

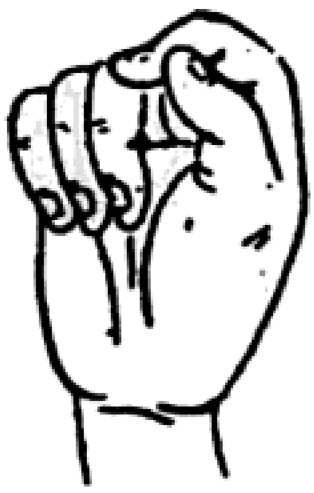


***Hansasya***



***Hanspaksha***





*Kapittha*

*Katakamukha*





*Sandesha* *Mukula*

regard to the movement and manipulation of hands, arms, wrists, palms, fingers, etc.

**The language of Limbs**

Thus, a danseuse or danseur has a wonderful language of hands glances and body postures at her or his command to suggest a world of imagery. The four fingers bend into the palm with the thumb set on them, and it is a *musti* (fist) grasping the hair; the middle and following fingers are separated and extended, the forefinger and thumb are joined and it becomes *hamsaya* (swan-face); the thumb and fingers are brought together showing their tips and a water-lily appears from nowhere. Peacocks dance, the kings appear in their full splendour, maidens distribute folded betel-leaves. the crescent moon is seen rising, the conch is blown. and emotions are portrayed. An inspired dancer performs, makes rhythmic movements. manipulates his hand (s) ingers in a desired

fashion and a beautiful imagery comes alive, a wide variety of emotions are communicated and nine *Rasas* are evoked.

**The Karnas**

The *Karna,* a unit of the dance movement is the corner stone of Indian classical dances. All rhythmic movements of dance originate from and have a source in it. There are in all 108 karnas which lie at the foundation of Indian classical dances. These are discussed in detail in the Natyashastra of Bharata. A combined movement of body and limbs results in a particula pose and it may be called a Karna. Thus a sequence of movement culminates in pose. A Karna can be static or dynamic. A sequence of four, six or eight Karnas give rise to an Angahara. Angaharas are really the large designs or patterns of the dance. These are 32 in numbers. About 10 Karnas are used frequently to from various Angaharas. A single karna is seldom used. Angaharas constitute a dance recital. All the 108 karnas can be seen beautifully sculptured in the famous Nataraja Temple at Chidambaram. This temple, 68 kms further south of Pondicherry towards Tanjore, is a veritable museum of classical dance postures. Lord Shiva in his aspect of Cosmic Dancer (Nataraja), cast in bronze, is housed in the sanctum sanctorum of the temple.

**The Charis**

The Charis is another term which deserves your due consideration. The movement of a foot or feet is called charis or pada-charis. The chari is the result of movement of one foot or of both the feet. Charis is of two kinds—bhumi-charis (earthly) and akash- charis (aerial). When the feet move on the earth the former results, but when one foot is on the earth and the other in the air, the latter results. There are in all 32 charis of which 6 are earthly and the rest 16 aerial.

Thus, the technique of Indian dance grows step by step into a complex organic whole to evoke a particular flavour or sentiment. In this whole process, the hands and fingers play the pivotal role, and keeping their endless potentialities in vfew Nandikeshvara has rightly observed, "where the eye goes, the bhava (mood) follows,

and where the mind goes, there arises the rasa (sentiment)''. The moving fingers of a dancer can grasp both a flower and the infinite with the same ease. Indian dancing has its own symbolical but elaborate language of movement and gesture through which most subtle and abstract ideas and spiritual visions can be given concrete shape and manifestation. What music communicates through sounds, and poetry does through words, the dance does through the very medium of human body and limbs. A dancer reveals, creates, communicates and suggests through movement, mime and accompanying music not only the mythological tales and legends of gods, goddesses and demons but also those of the heroes and heroines of Indian drama and epics and the whole range of human emotions—love, fear, hatred, affection, compassion, cowardice, repulsion, joys, sorrows, nobility, meanness, wit and the like. The origin and development of Indian dances form a special part of the history of the development of Indian culture and civilization. The recorded history of Indian arts, culture, religion and civilization is one of the most ancient ones, and its dances span the whole of it and even go byond into dim, immemorial past.

**The Audience**

Indian dances, religious in origin, devotional in spirit, highly complex and stylized, have laways been a very serious affair both for the performer and the viewer. Those who analysed the dancing in detali and framed its rules were the sages: they possessed insights into the art. They not only described the qualifications and qualities of a preceptor of the art, a danseuse or a danseur but also laid down the attributes of an ideal addience. Describing the audience the Abhinaya Darapana says. "The Audience shines like the Wishing tree, where the Vedas are its branches, scriptures of art and science (*shastras*) its flowers. and learned men the bees; where men of truth are found, shining with good qualities, famous for righteous conduct, honoured by kings, adorned by the Vedas; where the Vedanta is expounded; when the distinguished by the sound of voice and lute (vina); possessing heroes of renown, ornamented by resplendent princes, shining with royal splendour".

"The Seven Limbs of the Audience are mean of learning, poets,

elders, singers, buffoons, and those who are familiar with historv and mythology''.

**The Arts-Dancing & Sculpture**

The significance of *angibabhinaya* or body-movements and limb-manipulation can hardly be overemphasized in dancing. It makes the art of dancing sculpturesque or statusque. It is this component in dancing that makes dance and sculpture so intimate, interrelated and interdependent as each mirrors the other. Both these arts treas much of the same ground, speak the same language, use almost the same techniques and evoke the identical sentiments. In Indian sculptures and icons we find the different dance movements and poses frozen and arrested in stone, bronze, etc. The imagination of our sculptors seems to have been set aflame from time immemorial by the rhythmic dance postures and their inherent balance, harmony and movement in time and space par excellence. Underlining this intimacy and identicality Kapila Vatsyayan has very optly observed in her scholarly book, *Classsical Indian Dances in Literature and the Arts*, "Since Indian sculpture and Indian dancing treat of the human form and the movements of the different parts of the human form with an identical purpose of suggesting a state of being, a soul's state; they also use a similar formalized language of *abhinaya* and *bhava*, the *angas*, the *upangas* and the hastas''. In the same vein she further asserts, "the Indian dancer seems to aim at attaining the perfect pose, the moment of perfect balance, after a series of movement in time. The Indian sculptor in turn tries to capture cosmic movement through the perfection of rhythm and line; he also attempts to arrest the rapturous intensity and abandon of dance movement. From the earliest times to the sixteenth century, the Indian sculptor seems to be fascinated by the dynamic energy of the Indian dance: time and again he has tried to arrest the moment of vital and significant movement in stone: the prolificness of the dancing figure in Indian sculpture gives it a unique quality of rhythmic expression''.

The parallel at various levels is too striking to be lost sight of. The arts of dancing and sculpture are closely interdependent, and as such they play the dual role of the beneficiary and the benefactor

with each other. In short each of these arts gains its sustenance from and lend strength to the other. Both have been built on the same philosophic and aesthetic foundations. Our temple sculptures and icons are nothing but a vivid illustration of Indian classical dances in stone and metal. In this sense, every temple cave and shrine becomes essentially a sublime ensamble of mudras, poses, postures, stances and lineaments of movement and speed which are the essential components of a dance.

**Danu**

Primordial goddess. Hindu (Vedic). The word Danu is used to describe the primeval waters and this deity is probably their embodiment. She is known as the mother of the demonic personality Vrtra, who engages in combat with, and is defeated by, the rain god Indra. In later Hinduism she is perceived as a daughter of Daksa and the consort of Kasyapa.

**Daya** (compassion)

Goddess. Hindu (Puranic) A Sakti of Acyuta (never falling), a minor aspect of the god Visnu.

**Day-To-Day Problems & Hinduism**

From where did you get the idea? Your problems, my problems and even the problems of a newborn are equally important. I know that you are under a lot of pressure in school as well as at home. At school you have to listen to every mundane thing your classmates tell you and at home you have a totally different situtation. So the clash of ideas itself can generate hundreds of problems for you. You want to be one among your friends at school, in a way "to do in Rome as the Romans do" and at home you want to toe the line your father and mother dictate to you. I am also under pressure in my place of work. So we all have problems and all problems are important. You will never see a true Yogi ridiculing anyone's problems. He will try to help by suggestions in tune with the scriptures. Whatever we do in every walk of like is very important. That is the reason why Manu put down the Ashrama Dharma comprising *Kaumaram, Garhastyam, Vanaprastam* and *Sannyasa.* Even great saints are not allowed to bypass any stage in his/her life.

Legends say that Saint Veda Vyasa tried his best to stop his son Saint Suka from jumping from *Balyam* (boyhood) to *Sannyasa.* Legends also say that Sankaracharya was delayed in climbing *Sarvajna Peedam* at Benaras since he couldn's answer questions from Goddess Saraswati regarding *Garhastya Dharma* (householder's duty). Sankaracharya was forced to leave his body and occupy the dead body of a Brahmin householder in Kashmi for a year or so that he could answer all questions regarding *Garhasthya Dharma.* So every minute of our life is important from childhood to old age. The stages of life you and I are in are as important as the stage of life of a renunciate sitting on the banks of the river Ganges.

We are all seeking perfection in action and religion provides us with so many suggestions on how to tackle our day-to-day problems. As I have told you so many times it is you who are to decide what is good for you and which part of the religion is well suited to you. Some can just think of Lord Krishna and go into a trance, but for many such a way of meditation is unthinkable. So let *me repeat that your problems, my problems and even the problems of the newborn are equally important. Hinduism only gives us suggestions on how to tackle them and it never orders us what to do.* You and I have absolute freedom to do whatever we want to do not listen to ideas written in scriptures, we may make errors with grave consequences. That is all.

**Devaki** (*divine*)

Mother goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). Daughter of Devaka and consort of the mythical king Vasudeva, Devaki bore eight sons, including Krsna and Balarama. Her brother Kamsa believed that the eighth child would kill him and he slaughtered the first six sons. In order to save the remaining two. Visnu implanted the 'seed' of his *avataras* in Devaki's womb (in the form of hairs from his head) before transferring Balarama to the womb of the goddess Rohini and Krsna to Yasoda, the wife of a cowherd, Nanda.

**Devananda** (*delight of the gods*)

Goddess. Jain [India]. The mother of Mahavira.

**Devapurohita**

Astral god. Hindu (Puranic). An epithet for the planet god Jupiter.

**Devasena** (*heavenly host*)

Goddess. Hindu (Puranic). One of the consorts of Skanda who normally stands to his left. Attribute: lotus in the left hand.

**Devi** (*the goddess*)

Goddess epitomizing the active female principle. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). Devi evolved as a major goddess out of the older notion of mother and vegetation goddesses. She is seen more as an abstract principle who will nevertheless respond directly to worshippers prayers. By the fifth century AD she appears in many forms as the active (feminine) aspect or power of male deities. General attributes: conch, hook, noose, prayer wheel and trident. Devi is also the generic name given to a female deity, in her capacity as the consort of a god or deva. See also Sri-Devi, Bhudevi.

**Devils and Ghosts**

According to Hinduism, a devil is an Illusion or Maya. In Christianity, it is said that Devil or Satan "Fell from Heavens". In the Bible, it is described as follows: ...He was a murderer from the begining, and abode not in the Truth, because there is no truth in him. When he sheaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: For he is a liar, and father of it." (St. John 8-44).

Hinduism recognizes the Satanic force as the effect of Maya (Ilusion) and Maya is caused by *Ignorance.*

Meditation is one of the ways to get out of this delusion. Anyway, Hinduism does not regard the devil as the personification of a dangerous being, but only as a negative force standing against the spiritual upliftment of man.

Who creates the demonic forces in the world? We ourselves individually and collectively by our selfish and destructive thoughts, words and actions give birth to a multitude of demons. Hinduism calls these demons *Kritiyas.* These demonic forces attack

the weak and young among us. This is the reason why Hindu saints say that by hating someone we may be unknowingly destroying the sanctity of the home and even contribute to the destruction of the well-being of younger and weaker members of the family. If a whole nation personifies itself on hatred towards someone, that nation will ultimately meet with disaster.

Well, when I was telling you about demons, I was trying to give you a proper explanation based on very advanced Hindu scriptures. But if you pick up mythology, it is full of ghosts and demonic beings. They are mainly *Pretas* and *Bhutas* which are ctually departed sould of people.

*Pretas* are sould which letlt the bodies and by their own fault cannot enter any new body. Pretas are supposed to be under constant pain and they enjoy visiting dirty places. It is said that they easily influence people with weak minds. Bhutas are souls of people who left after an accidental death. Bhutas like Pretas are trouble-makers and it is said that both Pretas and Bhutas do not go to places where God-fearing people live. I know it will be difficult for you to believe in Pretas or Bhutas and I can understand your frame of mind. Mythology, as I told you before, is full of stories and it is upto you to believe in anything you want or not.

**Dhanada**

Goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). One of the emanations of the *dhyanibuddha* Amoghasiddhi, also a form of the goddess Tara. She sits upon a moon throne with an unnamed animal in attendance. Colour: green. Attributes: book, blue lotus, image of Amoghasiddhi, noose and rosary.

**Dhanistha** (*very rich*)

Minor goddess of misfortune. Hindu (Puranic). A malevolent *naksatra* or astral deity; daughter of Daksa and wife of Candra (Soma). Also Sravistha.

**Dhanvantari** (*travelling through an one*)

Sun god. Hindu (Vedie. Epic and Puranic). In later tradition a minor incarnation or *avatara* of the god Visnu also elosely

associated with medicine In Vedic mythology Dhanvantari carried the ambrosia created from the prineval occean of milk. He brought medical science to mankind. Only as the religion evolved did he become identified as an *avatara.* As Kantatman (*Pradyumna)* he is thought to be Kama reincarnated after his death at the hands of Siva. Various other epithets and existences are attributed to this deity. Offerings are due to him at dusk in the north eastern quarter. He is the guardian deity of hospitals which are usually in the vicinity of a sanctuary of Visnu. Attributes: two bowls containing ambrosia. Also Kantatman.

**Dhara** (*supporting*)

Attendant god. Hindu (Puranic). One of a group of eight *vasu* deities answering to the god Indra. Attributes: lotus, plough rosary and spear.

**Dharani** (*earth*)

1. Goddess. Hindu (Expic and Puranic). Consort of Parasurama and *an avatara* of the goddess Laksmi.

2. Collective name for a group of deities. Buddhist. Twelve personifications of a particular kind of short mystical religious text used as a charm. Also *dharini.*

**Dharma** (*justice*)

*Origin* Hindu (India).
*Known period of worship* circa 300 AD
until present.
*Synonyms* Dharme.
*Centre (s) of cult* none specific.
*Art references* stone and metal
sculptures.

**Dharmadhatuvagisvara**

*Literary sources* çpic texts including and *Kamavana* and *Mahabharata:*.Puranie texts. but also see the Rg Veda.

The god of law who originates as a creator god and one of the sons of Brahma. but almost certainly derives from the *dhamas* or

archetypal pattens of society identitied in the *Rg Veda.*

According to tradition he is the consort of thireen daughters of Daksa and the father of Yudhrshra. Also regarded as a minor *avatara of* Visnu, appearing as a bull standing for the redemption of souls.

In Bengali tradition Dharme (probably of the same derivation) has been annually engaged in a sacred marriag to the earth at the time of year when a tree known as the *sal* is blossoming. Birds are sacrificed in a sacred grove after which the tribe repairs to the hut of the village shaman and the marriage is enacted between the priest and his wife, followed by a sexual free-for- all.

**Dharmadhatuvagisvara**

God of the Buddhist. A variety of Manjusri and therefore an emanation of Amitabha. Colour: reddish-white. Attributes: arrow, beel, book, bow, hook, image of Amitabha on crown, staff, sword and water-jar. Depicted with four heads and setting the law wheel in motion.

**Dharmakirtisagaraghosa** (*sound of the ocean of the golory of the law*)

Physician god. Buddhist- Lamaist [Tibet]. Accounted amongst one of a series of medicine *buddhas* known as a *sMan-bla* in Lamaism. Typically depicted with stretched ear-lobes. Colour: red.

**Dharmamegha** (*cloud of the low*)

Mino goodess. Buddhist (Vajrayana). One of twelve deified *bhumis* recognized as different spiritual sphers through which a disciple passes. Colour: blue. Attributes: book and staff.

**Dharmapala**

Collective name for a group of eight utelary deities Buddhist and particularly Lamasist [Tibet]. They wear royal apparel but are of ternbs appearance and are considered to be the guardians of the law. General attributes: axe, cup, knife and snake.

**Dharmapratisamvit** (*analysis of nature*)

Goddess of nature analysis. Buddhist (Vajrayana). One of a group

of four *pratisamivits*. Colour: whitish-red. Attributes: noose and staff with crook.

**Dharma Sutras.**

The first law-givers of Hinduism. They were sages *Manu, Yajnavalkya, Parasara* and *Gautama.*

Their code books are known as *Dharma Sutras.*

Dharma Sutras are a part of *Vedangas.* They give elaborate details of rules of conduct and duties of men in different stages of life and the rights and duties of kings. They also deal with religious matters such as purification rites and funeral ceremonies. They even deal with rights and duties of women and judicial matters. They also describe penances for various sins. The most important Dharma Sutras is the *Manu Smriti* or the code of Manu written by sage Manu. It has 2,694 stanzas running into 12 chapters.

The next important Dharma Sutras is the *Yajnavalkya Smriti* written by sage *Yajnavalkya* It has 1,013 stanzas. Another important Dharma Sutras is the *Gautama Smriti* written by sage *Gautama.* The code of Manu is still very popular among Hindus. The Dharma Sutras exercise everlasting influence on Hinduism. It is the backbone of Hindu ethics and morality. Of course much of the rituals described in the Dharma Sutras are not practised today. But orthodox members of the Brahmin caste still observe the five daily Dharmas known as *Pancha Maha Yajnas.*

The five daily Dharmas observed by the orthodox members of the Brahmin caste are known as the *Pancha Maha Yajnas.* They are:

1. *Deva Yajna* — worship of God

2. *Brahma Yajna* — worship of Lord Brahma

3. *Pitri Yajna* — worship of ancestors

4. *Bhuta Yajna* — worship of spirits

5. *Nara Yajna* — worship of man.

All Brahmins still undergo three important ceremonies in their lifetime as dictated by the Dharma Sutras. They are.

1. *Upanayana* — receiving the holy-thread in boyhood. After this ceremony the boy is called a *Dwija* (twice-born)

2. *Vivaha* — marriage

3. *Anthyeshti* — funeral rites.

**Dharmavasita.** (*control of law*)

Minor goddess. Buddhist. One of a group of twelve *vasitas* personifying the disciplines of spiritual regeneration. Colour: white. Attributes: water jar on a red lotus.

**Dharti Mata**

Mother goddess. Hindu (Puranic). A deity who appears late in Hinduism and equates with Prthivi or Bhumidevi. According to some authors she is the consort of Thakur Deo. Also Dhartri Mai, Darti Awwal.

**Dhatar** (*creator*)

Sun god. Hindu (Puranic). An original Vedic list of six descendnts of the goddess Aditi or *adityas*, all of whom take the role of sun gods was, in later times, enlarged to twelve, including Dhatar. Colour: golden. Attributes: two lotuses, lotus rosary and water-jar. Also Dhatr.

**Dhisana**

Minor goddess of prosperity. Hindu (Vedic). Associated with the acquistion of wealth. Also the name given to a bowl of fermented drink or *soma*.

**Dhrtarastra** (*this empire is firm*)

Minor god. Buddhist. One of the *dikpalas* or guardians of the easterly direction. Colour: white. Attribute: lute.

**Dhrti** (*firmness*)

Goddess. Jain (India). A minor deity with no significant role or attributes.

**Dhruva** (*immovable*)

Astral god. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). The son of Uttanapada, a star in the constellation of Ursa Minor which was the pole star in the last millennium BC. An *avatara* of Visnu. Also one of a group of *vasu* deities answering to the god Indra. In different context, the description of a kind of fixed icon. Attributes: prayer wheel, rosary, spear and water jar.

**Dhumavati** (*smoky*)

Goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). One of a group of ten *mahavidyas* personifying the *Sakti* of Siva. Aspects include Darunaratri (night of frustration), who is also regarded as one of the personifications of the goddess Sakti.

**Dhumorna** (smoke)

Goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). The consort of Yama. Attribute: a pomegranate.

**Dhumravati**

Terrile goddes. Hindu (Puranic). Attributes: skull in the hand and garland of skulls, sword and tusks.

**Dhupa** (*incense*)

Mother goddess. Buddhist-Lamaist (Tibet]. One of the astamatara mothers.

Colour: yellow. Attribute: a censer.

**Dhupatara** (*incense-Tara*)

Minor goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana) Colour: black. Attribute: a censet.

**Dhurjati** (*with matted*)

God. Hindu (Epic and Pauamic). A manifestation of Siva in which his body is smeared with ash.

**Dhvajagrakeyura** (*ring on a banner*)

Goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana. An emanation of Aksobhya. She

sits on a sun throne. Colour dark blue, black or yellow. Attributes: club, image of Aksobhya. noose, pestle, prayer wheel, staff, sword. tiger skin and trident. Three-headed and three- eyed.

**Dhvajosnisa**

God. Buddhist. An *usnisa* deity apparently connected with the guardian deities or *dikpalas* in the south-western quarter. Colour: reddish-blue. Attributes: banner with jewel.

**Dhyanaparamita** (*perfection in meditation*)

Philosophical deity. Buddhilst. A paramita and spiritual offspring of Ratnasambhava Colour: darkish sky blue. Attributes. banner with jewel, and white lotus.

**Dhyanibuddha**

General name of a spiritual or meditation *buddha*. Buddhist (Vajrayana). An emanation of the adibuddha and generally regarded as one of a group of five representing the cosmic elements. The mystic counterpart of a human *buddha.* When the five are represented as a group their common attribute is a staff on a lotus.

**Digambara** (*naked*)

Goddess. Buddhist-Lamaist [Tibet]. The *Sakti* of Yogambara. Attribute: a bowl.

NOTE: Digambara is also an epithet of the goddess Kali in Hindu religion.

**Dikkumara**

God. Jain [India]. One of the groups under the general title of bhavanavasi (dwelling in places). They have youthful appearance and are associated with rain and thunder.

**Diksa** (*initiation*)

Goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). The consort of Ugra and mother of Santana. Also the name of the Buddhist Tantric initiation ceremony.

**Dipa** (*personification of the oil-lamp*)

Goddess of light. Buddhist- Lamaist [Tibet]. Considered to be amongst the group of *astamataras* (mothers). Colour: blue or red. Attribute: a torch.

**Dipa Tara** (*lamp Tara*)

Minor goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). Colour: yellow. Attribute: a toreh.

**Dipankara** (*light causer*)

Deity. Buddhist-Lamaist [Tibet]. One of a minor group of buddhas. Colour: yellow. Attributes: none in particular.

**Dipti** *(brighness)*.

Minor goddess. Hindu (Puranic). No details available.

**Dirghadevi** (long goddess)

Goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). Consort of the god Nirrti.

**Disa** (*the ten directions of space*)

Goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). Consort of Siva in his terrible aspect of Bhima and mother of the ninor god Sarga (creation).

**Diti**

Goddess. Hindu (Vedic, Epic and Puranic). The daughter of Daksa, a consort of Aditi (in the) or Kasyapa and the mother of a race of demons. Attributes: blue lotus, child and fruit. See also Aditi.

**Drugs & Hinduism**

Hinduism very clearly understands the power of drugs and Hindu saints knew which herbs in fact give the so-called "high" feeling among users. Hinduism`looks down upon the consumption of drugs like LSD, Heroine and "Crack" as means to attaining different levels of consciousness. The reason is that even though certain *is momentary* and *dangerous.* People using drugs usually go into depressive states of mind after a few moments of "chemical paradise". So hours and days of mental agony for a few moments of higher experience are not the answer. Drugs, according to

Tantric literature, result in the sudden shooting up of Kundalini power in the Sushumna nerve, but since the ordinary body is not conditioned to accept sudden outbursts of power within itself, it reacts in physical and mental disorder. That is the reason why a drug addict undergoes violent hallucinations and suffers permanent damage to his brain. So if at all any drug is used, it should be used only under the advice of a competent medical doctor or under the guidance of a Guru who has thorough knowledge of herbal medicine and Ayurveda.

*Let me repeat that Hinduism strictly forbids use of drugs in meditation. In some forms of the Hindu meditation method, even stimulants like coffee and tea are forbidden.*

**Durangama** (*going far away*)

Minor goddess. Buddhist (Vajrayana). One of several deified bhumis recognized as different spiritual spheres through which a disciple passes. Colour: green. Attributes: staff on a great lotus.

**Durga**

Origin Hindu (Puranic) [India].

Vengeful warrior goddess.

*Known period of worship* circa 400 AD (but probably known from earlier times) until present.

*Synonyms Kumari*; Shakti; Agni-Durga (eight-armed; Aparajita (unconquered).

*Centre (s) of cult* none.

*Art references* sculptures generally bronze but also stone. Reliefs.

*Literary-sources* chiefly Ramayana and Mahabharata epics and Puranic texts, but mentioned by name in Vedic literature.

Durga is one of the angry and aggressive aspects of the goddess *Sakti,* whose earliest role in Hindu mythology is to fight and conquer demons but who also personifies the *Sakti* or female aspect of any male deity. Iconographically, Durga is depicted as a beautiful golden-skinned woman who rides upon a lion or a tiger.

She has eight or ten arms. each bearing a weapon presented to her by different gods and including the conch shell of Visnu, the trident of Siva, the bow of Rama and the *sudarshan* (spoked disc) of Krsna. These gifts extend to her the power of the eight or ten gods. She may wear a necklace of skulls. She is associated with the Himalaya and Vindhya mountains and is often depicted slaughtering the buffalo- demon Mahisa by throusting hertrident into his body.

In a contrasting aspect in later Hindu traditions, Durga takes the role of a mother goddess and consort of Siva and becomes partly syncretized with Parvati. She is also linked with the fertility of crops. In this capacity her most important festival is the *Durga Puja*, celebrated at harvest time, during which devotees persistently make obscene gestures and comments to stimulate her fecundity. She is depicted flanked by four other deities. Laksmi, Sarasvati. Ganesa and Karttikeya, who are said to be her children.

In general Durga is perceived in northern India as as the gentle bride epitomizing family unity, whilst in southern India shw is revered more in her warlike and murderous aspect.

Durga, the consort of the well-known god Shiv, is perhaps the most important goddess of Hindus. She is a multi-dimensional goddess. She has so many names, so many personalities and so many facets. She is worshipped by millions of people all over India and a sizeable number of them give her an importance more than god Shiv himself.

She was first born in the house of Daksha, one of the progenitors of mankind and was named as Satee. She was married to Shiv but sacrificed her life by self-immolation on a pyre. The story says that Daksha instituted a massive sacrifice and in the ceremonies apportioned no share to Shiv. Satee, his daughter, had come to this ceremony against the advice other husband, Shiv, who was not invited by the latter's father-in-law. Satee could not bear this insult and entered the sacrificial fire. Hearing the news Shiv flew in a rage and reached there with his blazing trident.

He pierced the sacrificial altar with great violence. He ran up to the

gods sitting there and knocked out all things at the spot. So many powerful demi-gods in attendance to Shiv attacked the place together with their lord. The mountains tottered, the earth shook, the winds roared and the depths of the sea were disturbed. The catastrophe is thus described in Purans: "Indra is knocked down and trampled on, Yama has his staff broken, Saraswati and Matris have their noses wounded, Bhaga has his eyes pulled out, Pushan has his teeth knocked down his throat, Chandra (the moon) is pummelled, Agni's hands are broken, Bhragu's beard is crushed, Prajapatis are beaten and the gods are running helter and skelter" In the end Vishnu intervened and propitiated the wrath of Shiv. Daksha acknowldged Shiv's supremacy and apportioned a due share to this god.

In her second appearance Durga came to the world as Parvati, the daughter of Himalaya. As she was Satee, the daughter of Daksha married to Shiv in her previous birth, in the second life too she wanted to be the consort of Shiv. But after the sacrifice of his first wife Shiv had lost all interest in marriage. Parvati now realised that there was only one way of attracting his attention and winning his affection. She undertook ascetic rites and recited praying hymns for one thousand years to please god Shiv. Only then Shiv was convinced that Parvati was worthy of being accepted as a wife. The wedding of Shiv and Parvati is described in a very colourful manner in Puranic literature and so many songs have been composed how the marriage procession of Shiv is composed of beggars, mendicants and wanderers.

As mentioned above goddess Durga has a variety of forms with different attributes. In her milder form she is Parvati (the mountain-girl), Uma (the light), Gauri (the yellow-complexioned beauty), Himavati (daughter of Himalaya), Jagatmata (mother of the world) and Bhavani (the goddess of the universe); in her terrible form she is Durga (the inaccessible), Kali or Shyama (the black complexioned), Chandika or Chandi (the fearful one) and Bhairavi (the terrible). All these are broadly included under the name of Devi or Maha Devi (the great goddess).

How Parvati, the consort of Shiv, came to have the name of Durga

is an interesting narration. On one occasion the sage Agastya asked Kartikeya why Parvati, his mother was called Durga. Kartikeya replied that some time back there was a demon, named Durg, the son of Ruru. He with his austerities pleased Brahma and by the god's blessings became very powerful. He conquered the three worlds and even dethroned Indra, the king of gods. Every one was afraid of him. He abolished all religious ceremonies so that Brahmans were terrified and stopped reading Vedas.

All the gods assembled and prayed to god Shiv to protect them from the tyranny of this demon. Shiv took pity on them and asked Parvati to go and destroy the evil demon. She calmed the gods and accepted the commission. There was long drawn-out and fierce battle. As soon as the giant came near with his evil followers Parvati assumed 1000 arms and also brought out a number of weapons out of her body. She repelled every attack and in the end the demon assumed the shape of a fearful buffalo and with his horns cast trees, rocks and mountains on the goddess, who cut everything into pieces. The goddess Parvati pierced him with her trident and subdued him. The gods with this deliverance praised the goddess and honoured Parvati with the name of Durga.

Another legend connected with Durga is that Mahishasur, a king of the demons, at a certain period overcame all the gods and reduced them all to the state of incompetence. Indra together with all gods approached Shiv and Vishnu. These two great gods became very angry at the misdeeds of this demon and at the request of the suffering gods produced from their energy a goddess named Mahamaya or Durga. Streams of glory emanated from all gods and entered Mahamaya, who now resembled a mountain of fire and strength. This goddess killed the demon Mahishasur and delivered the gods from the distress.

The festival of Durga, celebrated during the month of Ashwin, is the most popular festival of Bengal. All the business in the state is more or less suspended and the most beautiful and costly images of the goddess are made. The image of Durga has ten arms. In one of her right hands is a long pointed spear, with which she is piercing the heart of demon Mahishasur, with one of the left hands she holds

the hair of this giant. Her all other hands are also filled with various weapons. Against her right leg leans a lion and against her left leg lies the demon subdued and defeated. Very frequently, small images of Lakshmi, Saraswati, Kartikeya and Ganesh are also placed by the side of the goddess. At the close of the festival, these images are immersed into the river.

According to Markendaya Puran the goddess Durga has assumed ten different forms in order to destroy two great demons, Shambhu and Nishambhu. It is said that at the close of the Tretayug, these two giants by their austerities had obtained great powers. Being exalted above the gods they began to fight against them. They achieved many victories and gods were reduced to the deplorable state of helplessness. They solicited the help of Brahma and Vishnu, who referred them to go to Shiv. Shiv advised them to pray to Durga, who could be able to defeat the two demons. Finally when gods appealed to Durga for ending their troubles, she agreed.

Durga assumed the form of a beautiful woman and first enticed the minds of the two demons. Both of them sought to capture her and sent his best generals with a huge army to capture this female. These two generals named Chundu and Mundu went went to the Himalayas but were defeated and killed by the goddess Durga and her mount, the divine lion. Now two giants, Shambhu and Nishambhu, themselves marched to the Himalayas to capture Durga. These two demons had a general who had a blessing that the drops of blood falling on the ground from his body would create thousands of demons. At last Durga could annihilate him only when Durga's two forms namely Chandee and Kali both combined to neutralise this blessing. In the fierce engagements the goddess opened her mouth and drank every drop of blood before it fell on the ground while the other counterpart fought the demons and that general together. Eventually both the giants were killed.

Markandeya Puran places the ten forms of Durga in the following order: (1) Durga, the goddess who first recived and showed her beautiful face to entice the demons; (2) Dashbhooja—in this form she destroyed a part of the army of demons; (3) Singh-Vahinee-in this form she fought with Rakta-Vijay, the general whose drops of

blood created thousands of demons; (4) Mahisha-Mardinee—in this form she slew Shambhu, the demon, who had taken the form of a buffalo; (5) Jagdhatree-in this form she overcame the army of demons; (6) Kali—is this form she destroyed Rakt-Vijay by drinking the drops of blood and not allowing them to fall on the ground; (7) Mukt—Keshee-in this form with flowing hair she again overcame another army of the demons; (8) Tara—in this form she killed Sambhu; (9) Chinnamushtika-in this form she killed Nishambhu; (10) Jagadguree—in this form she was worshipped by all the gods on their salvation.

*Singh-Vahinee*—In this form Durga is benign as well as belligerent. She is represented as the goddess with yellow garments and a glittering crown. She is sitting on a lion with either four, eight or ten hands. One hand is always shown bestowing a blessing on the worshippers.

This image is very popular in the whole of north India and night-long prayers (Jagratras) are held in temples or in homes by householders. Devotional songs are sung and in the early morning the worship comes to a close.

*Tara*—In this shape the goddess is shown as a fierce black woman with four arms with one foot on the breast of Shiv, her consort. In one hand she holds a sword covered with blood; in another she has a demon's head while the remaining two are holding other lethal weapons. The foot on Lord on Lord Shiv's breast denotes a story that when blood-thirsty Durga's anger against the demons could not be controlled and she continued destruction, Lord Shiv squatted on her path. When she put her foot on him, she immediately realised that she was treading upon her consort and her anger subsided.

*Kali*—This is the ferocious aspect of Durga perfectly personified. According to the Purans, this image of Durga as Kali, so widely worshipped in eastern parts of India, owes its origin to the battle of Durga with Sambhu and Nishambhu. She affter her victory over these demons was so overjoyed that she started the dance of death. Here the story resembles that of Tara. In her great ecstasy Kali continued the destruction. As the prayers of all gods could not calm

her, Lord Shiv had to intervene. Seeing no other way of dissuading her the god threw himself amongst the bodies of slain demons. When Durga saw that she was dancing over the body of her husband, she put her tongue out of her mouth in sorrow and surprise. She remained stunned in this posture and this is how Kali is shown in dmages with the red tongue protruding from her mouth.

Adhyatma Ramayan gives another story of the origin of Kali. It says that when Ram returned home with Sita after destroying Ravan, he was boastfully narrated the stories of his victories to Sita. She smiled and said, "You rejoice because you have killed a Ravan with ten hands. But what shall you doo with a Ravan with one thousands hands?" Ram very proudly boasted that he would destroy that demon too. At this shallenge of his wife Ram collected his whole army and the army of all his allies and started for Shatdweep, the abode of this new demon with one thousand hands. This new Ravan was powerful demon. When attacked he disscharged three magoic arrows from his bow. One of these sent all the monkeys to Kishkindha, their place of residence; another sent the army of Vibhishan, who was an ally of Ram and the ruler of Lanka after Ravan's death, back to their region beyond seashore, while the third arrow sent all soldiers of Ram back to Ayodhya, Ram's capital. Ram felth humiliated and then Sita laughingly assumed the form of terrific Kali; she attacked this new Ravan with one thousand heads. After a long fight she killed the demon, drank his blood and began to long fight dance and toss about the limbs of his body. She was calmed by Shiv. However, this story has not received popular approval.

In the images commonly worshipped Kali is shown as a very black female with four arms. In one hand she has a scymitar, in another the head of demon which she holds by his hair, the third hand is spread flatly open bestowing a blessing and in the fourth she holds another weapon, usually a spear. She wears two heads of demons in place of ear rings and has a necklace of skulls. Her tongue is blood red and hangs down upon her chin. Blood is also seen streaming from her tongue and upon her body. She is shown standing with one foot on the breast of Shiv and the other restson this thigh.

Animal sacrifice is done before Kali to please her and she is the favourite goddess of the dacoits, who believe that they will be saved of all dangers by the grace of Kali.

At Kali Ghat near Calcutta is the most celebrated image of Kali. Other forms of Kali are Chamunda, Shamshan Kali (goddess of the cremation ground), Bhadra Kali, Ugra Chandi, Bheem Chandi, Siddheshwari, and Sheetal (the goddess of small-pox). People also worship her to protect their children from dreaded diseases and their homes from ill omens.

*Chamunda*—As this name of Durga implies she killed two demons, Chanda and Munda. From the forehead of Durga sprang a goddess of jet black complexion, robed in the hide of an elephant, with a garland of dead cropses. With red hot eyes and a long tongues she uttered a big shout and jumped upon the two demons. After this, the goddess Durga was also named as Chamunda or Chamundi

Durga, in fact, is goddess most widely worshipped throughout India in various ways and under various names.

**Durjaya** (*unconquerable*)

Minor goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). An attendant of the god Buddhakapala.

**Dusara** (*the one of sara*)

Local tutelary god. Western Semitic (Nabataean). Associated with vegetation and fertility in the Hauran region from about 312 BC until circa 500 AD. Regarded as a supreme deity, comparable to Baal Samin, who never achieved Dusara's popularity amongst the nomadic Nabataeans, for whom farming wasprecarious. He was represented by a black obelisk at Petra. Sacred animals are the eagle and panther. Attributes include a vine stem. In Hellenic times he was the subject of inscriptions at Delos and Miletus and he was equated with Dionysos. Also Dusares:: Dus Sara.

**Dvipakumara**

God. Jain (India). One of the groups under the general tiltle of *bhavanavasi* (dwelling in places). They are of youthful appearance and associated with rain and thunder.

**Dyauspitar** (heaven father)

*Origin Hindu* (Vedic) [India]. Creator god.

*Known period of worship* circa 1500 BC or earlier until present.

*Synonyms* the Sanskrit *dyaus* is derived from the Indo-European root which also gives Deus (Roman); Zeus (Greek); Tyr (German) etc.

*Centre (s) of cult* none specific.

*Art reference* none.

*Literary sources Rg-veda* and other Vedic texts.

Dyaus pitar is a creator god associated with the goddess Prthivi: the primordial Couple are normally addressed as Dyavaprthivi. Between them they created the rest of the Yedic pantheon, placed heaven and earth in conunction with one another and gererally preseved to cosmic order.

# E

**Easiest From of Meditation**

*Ham-Sa* or popularly known as *Baby Pranayama* is the easiest and safest method of all. It has been found that those animals which take long durations of breaths (the time for one cycle of inhalation and exhalation) live long lives, whereas those which take short durations of breaths live short lives. It is also interesting to note that a person's health and character are very much a reflection of his breathpattern. Generally people who take short breaths are weak, nervous and very undependable, whereas those who take longer and deeper breaths are usually trustworthy, happy people. When a person gets agitated, his breath-pattern changes rapidly, taking shorter and showter breaths. When a person develops sublime thoughts in him, he takes longer and longer breaths. Thousands of years ago the Rishis, the great scientists of Hinduism found out that there are vital currents in the body called 'Prana'. They also found that *there is a close relationship between Breath* and *Prana, Prana* and *Thought and Thought and Mind.* In brief Prana is interconnected with the whole body mechanism and they foud out the system of exercises called *Pranayama.*

As I told you before, *Pranayama* is the most scientific method of controlling vital currents in the body. Pranayama has to be practised only under the guidance of a very capable Guru and it is associated with a lot of Do's and Don'ts or Yama-Niyamas. *Hamsa* literally means swan—the beautiful white bird that swims in silent lakes. In Hinduism, the swan also symbolises purity and tranquillity. In this method one indiectly chants the Mantra sah-*Aham* meaning 'He is I'. It is also worth noticing that when a man

inhales he makes a noise *Ham* or *Aham*. When a man exhales he makes a noise *Sa* or *Sah*. Now coming back to the main point, the *Hamsa* method is the method of watching the incoming and outgoing breaths (inhalation and exhalation) without interfering with the rhythm of breathing.

The method is very simple. You may sit or stand or lie down in whattever position you like to do this. You can do it at any time of the day or night you want. You can do this at any place you want. you can do it for as much time as you like.

Prior to following this method, if it helps you, you may do deep-breathing exercises to bring in "rhythmic breathing" in your system for five or ten minutes.

Now let me elaborate the actual *Hamsa* method: Just watch inhabation and exhalation without interferin with the process of breathing, without even trying to control chest or nostril movements. Do not even try to change the rhythm of breathing. Just say to yourself: "I am just going to watch my breathing — I am going to enjoy myself watching my breath." That is all.

The first result will be that you will fall asleep during this exercise. According to Hinduism, sleep is a hindrance to meditation. But I feel people should be happy if they fall asleep during this exercise since many have to take high doses of sleeping pills, to fall asleep. Once you have transcended sleep, in the next stage you will start going into mental conditions without any thought at all. In this mental state, you will also find your breath-pattern slow down consIderably. In this state of mind, you will start enjoying peace and happiness to which you were accustomed before. Of course first you will have this enjoyable mental state for a few minutes only. As time goes on this mental state will last for several minutes and finally for hours.

*This exercise will immediately reduce stress conditions in you.* The stress is the mental condition one will have as a result of involuntary thinking. This method will also help you to face difficult situations in life. One thing worth mentioning about this exercise is that it has no negative effects at all.

The scientific explanation of this method is very simple. In stress and high emotional stages, your breath-pattern is very erratic and you exhibit a tendency to take shorter and shorter breaths. But when you practise this exercise you will be able to develop rhythmic breathing like an alternating sinusoidal wave. Since there is a very close connection between breath, brain waves, thought and mind, we are indirectly controlling thought, brain waves and mind by directly watching the involuntary breaths. If you look deeper into this method, you will also see that due to the practice of this method your breath is slowing down since we are trying to make involuntary breathing a voluntary action in the body. During the practice of this method, your brain-waves will change into alphawaves initially. This method is very simple and believe it or not we are all doing this atleast once every day. Surprisingly, breath is the last thing we are aware of when we go to sleep every day. To repeat, this exercise has no negative effect at all and even though you may or may not fully agree with some of my scientific interpretations, I think you should try this method of meditation.

**Earliest Forms of Hinduism**

*Hindu* is a fairly new term, of Persian origin. After their conquest of northern India in the twelfth century A.D., Muslims used it to describe persons belonging to the original population of Hind, or India. As used here, India means the whole Indian subcontinent. But the subcontinent is also the birthplace of Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, and to distinguish Hinduism from these faiths, we sometimes call it Brahmanism, that is, the religion taught by the ancient priestly class of *brahmans.* Although the brahmans did not create all of Hinduism, their leadership has been so dominant that the name is appropriate. Their authority is one of the factors that sets Hinduism apart from all other beliefs. The geographical connotation of the term Hinduism is significant, however, because the Hindu religion derives much of its nature from the special characteristics of its homeland.

Hinduism, literally "the belief of the people of India," is the predominant faith of India and of no other nation. About 85 percent of all Indians declare themselves to be Hindu, along with a

substantial minority of the population of Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan). In addition, conversions and migrations in ancient and modern times have created small groups of Hindus in Sri Lanka (Ceylon). Indonesia, Fiji. Africa, Great Britain, and the Americas. But like Confucianism in China and Shinto in Japan. Hinduism belongs primarily to the people of one country.

Hinduism arose among a people who had no significant contact with the biblical religions. Hindu teaching does not consist of alternative answers to the questions asked by Western faiths. For instance, Hinduism does not insist on any particular belief about God or gods. Those reared in religions holding firmly to definite beliefs regarding God are often baffled by Hinduism's relaxed attitude in theology. We need to realize that the beliels on which Hindus insist relate to problems that are especially acute in the Indian environment and that the hopes of Hindus are shaped by what seems desirable and possible under the special conditions of Indian life. Hindus, like others, seek superhuman resources to help preserve life and achieve its highest conceivable blessedness but they perceive life's threats and promises as those posed by the Indian land and climate.

## The Geographical Setting

Two geographical factors have determined many of the themes and emphases of Hindu religious thought: (1) India is an agricultural land; and (2) India is an isolated land.

## India as a Land of Farmers

We sometimes forget the ancient fame of India as a vast and fertile land of fabulous richness. Throughout histroy, the rich alluvial soil of India' northern river valleys, which extend for about two thousand miles from east to west thas always supported a very large population. Indians have depended more exclusively on farming than have the people of most other major cultures. And despite the recent growth of industrial cities. India still remains overwhelmingly a land of farming villages.

The Hindu cosmology (view of the universe) is the creation of minds constantly aware of the germination of plant and the

reproduction of domestic animals. Nature itself is seen as feminine, and female deities have a prominent place in classical Hindu mythology.

The persistent anxieties of India's farmers have had a dramatic impact on Hindu religion. India has always been both blessed and cursed by natural conditions, the most frightening of which is the matter of adequate water. The average rainfall is plentiful, but several times a century the monsoon clouds fais to roll in from the sea, the rain does not fall, and the crops do not grow. This possibility may have something to do with the great attention paid to water in Hinduism's rituals. Scarcely any ritual is performed without preliminary bathings, sprinklings, sippings, libations to a deity, or other ceremonial uses of water. In Hindu mythology the formal position of king of the gods is held by Indra, the god of rain, and in the conceptions of many of the goddesses there are manifestations of the ever present concen with water.

Most of the goddesses have a clear connection with the fertility of the earth, and Hindu theologians have built into their personalities something of the character of the forces controlling the agricultural world. In their worship of these deities. Hindus attempt to establish better relations with a generative force conceived as a usually generous mother who can sometimes be moody and is capable of violent tantrums. The ambibalence of this power is recognized in the beliefs that the goddess appears in different forms and moods and that the divine mother is not onlyn the affectionate Sita or Parvati, but also the dangerous Kail, an irritable parent who sometimes destroys her children in inexplicable rages. The dual focus of worship symbolizes the alternating pattern of abundant harvests and catastrohic droughts. And the persistent anxiety about the food supply explains Hinduism's great tolerance for the pursuit of practical goals in worship. Those who study Hindu rituals or read popular literature often perceive them as materialistic in spirit. It is understandable that prescientific peoples living with such natural threats to survival should be preoccupied with physical well-being.

**India's Isolation and Stability**

A second important geographical factor in the for mation of Indian religiou is the barrier of mountains and seas that separates India from the rest of the world and shields its way of life from disruption by outsiders. On India's southern flanks the seas are wide, and heavily populated lands and distant. Hostile armadas of seagiong peoples have never landed invading forces that were able to overwhelm India by the power of foreign armies alone. India's long northern border is protected by the Himalayas, mountains so high that no army coming from China. Burma, or Tibet has ever conquered India. Although passes on the northwest border through the Afghan mountains have been used as gateways by many bands of invaders, they have had to cross wide barren regions that have limited the size of their armies. Only an almost prehistoric Aryan incursion has ever penetrated India in such force as to permeate and transform Indian civilization.

In historical times. Persians, Greeks, Scythian, Huns, Mongols, and others have invaded India in modest numbers and set up kingdoms on the northern plains. But they were always few in relation to the population of the rest of the country, and they were able to rule successfully only by using Indian assistants, Indian administrative institutions, and Indian languages. The invaders soon married Indian women, came to terms with the brahmans, and were given a traditional Indian status in society. Even the Muslim and British dominations of the past millenium— each powerful in its own way—did not cause any radical displacement of the age-old Hindu social order.

**The Quest for Inner Peace and Harmony**

India's cultural security also has helped determine the concerns that are prominent in the Hindu religion. Anxiety regarding the survival of a loved tradition is not a significant worry in the Hindu scriptures. India's natural defensive advantages made the established order of Hinduism easy to maintain, and the imposed on Hindus the opposite problem: a confining stability.

India's more traditional villages preserve even today a pattern of

social relations that has not essentially changed for more than two thousand years. For centuries most Hindus have accepted the tasks of an inherited occupation and died in the rank in which they were born. Hindu society's demands on its members are extremely heavy, and its restraints are deeply felt even when they are not resisted or even resented. The frustration of individual Hindus is experienced as a general sense of living in a bondage involving no external object of blame. It is not characteristic of Hindus to blame their problems on society or to demand that their favor. It has been an axiom of Hinduism that the responsibility for resolving one's tensions with the world lies squarely with oneself: inner adjustment is the way to tranquillity and contentment.

One distinguishing mark of Hinduism is its intense interest in techniques of self-examination and self-control that can enable individuals to attain peace of mind and harmony with the world. At the most ordinary level, these methods of inducing tranquillity take the form of moral teaching. The Hindu literature presents as ideal the person who through mastery of impulse presserves his emotional stability and mental balance. In the second canto of the Bhagavadgita Song of the Lord), one of the classic writings of Hinduism, the truly holy, man is described in these terms:

*When he sets aside desires,*
*All that have entered his mind, O Partha,*
*And is contented in himself and through himself,*
*He is called a man of steady wisdom*

*He whose mind stirs not in sorrows,*
*Who in joys longs not for joys,*
*He whose passion, fear and wrath are gone,*
*That steady-minded man is called a sage.*

Hinduism has other methods for calming the troubled mind. In disciplines called yoga, Hindu teachers of meditation offer guidance in subjective processes through which it is possible to dissolve desires, still one's passions, enter into equanimity and relieve the tedium of life with inner feelings of joy that are believed to be a foretaste of an everlasting freedom and immorality. As a final resort the seeker of tranquility is urged to enter into the

separated life of the world-abandoning *sannyasi.*

If a religion can be defined by what it believes to be the most blessed condition that humanity can know, then Hinduism is the religion of tranquillity. Tranquility of mind is understood to be also a tranquillity of being, a reward for which a Hindu should be willing to sacrifice all else.

The salient characteristics we have mentioned will be discussed further as we explore more fully the Hindu way of life. We have pointed out that such prominent catures of the Hindu religion have a cause. Behind them lies the distinctive nature of India itself as a physical setting for human life.

**The Indus Valley Civilization**

Scholars long believed that the history of the Hindu tradition began when the Vedas were composed. The oldest of the Hindu scriptures, the Vedas were the religious poems of a people called Aryans, who migrated to India in about the middle of the second millennium B.C. But in the twentieth twentieth century, archaeologists have been able to show, in publications beginning with Sir John Marshall's *Mohenjo-Daro and the Indus Civilization*, that the Aryans were neither India's first civilized people nor the creators of all that is old in Hinduism. At least a thousand years before the Aryans arrived, earlier inhabitants had already created a literate culture in northwestern India. We do not know the name of these earlier civilizers because their system of writing has not been deciphered, but since their home was in the basin of the Indus River and its borderlands, they are commonly referred to as "the Indus Valley civilization." It is now known that the great stream of Hindusism came from two sources. The younger source was the religious tradition of the Aryan invaders. The older was the religious heritage of the religious tradition of the Aryan invaders. The older was the religious heritage of the civilization of the Indus Valley.

**The Ruins at Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa**

The people who created the early culture of the Indus Valley were of a racial mixture not very different from that of India's modern

population. They grew a variety of food grains and kept cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, and chickens as domestic animals. They manufactured rather crude tools and weapons of copper and bronze. Their bullock carts were built in a style still used today by the farmers of that region. To write their language they used over 250 characters that have little relation to any alphablet now known. By 2400 B.C. their civilization was at its height and was engaged in trade by sea with Mesopotamia. The sites of sixty of their towns have been found, and two of them, Mohenejo-Daro and Harappa, appear to be the ruins of cities that were political capitals.

This culture of the Indus was contemporary with those of the Euphrates and the Nile. At the Indus sites archaeolgists have found the first planned cities known to history. The residential portion of each Indus city was laid out upon a grid of major throughfares crossing each other at right angles. The houses were supplied with water from wells carefully lined and curbed with masonry. Each house had a paved bathroom with a hand-flushed toilet draining out into covered sewers that were buried under the street. The administrative center was a somewhat elevated walled citadel next to the residential city. The major cities had public granaries located in or directly below the citadels.

Throughout a region a thousand miles long from north to south and almost as wide, this single style of urban living prevailed. The same units of length were used everywhere, and weights were of such a strict uniformity that an inspection system can be assumed. It is likely that the authorities controlled the people in a characteristic Indian way, by supervision of the food supply rather than by extensive use of arms. Some kind of difference between rulers and ruled was strongly felt, as evidenced by the separateness of the citadels and by the strength of their walls in comparison with the weak defenses of the cities themselves.

**Indus Religious Beliefs**

Discerning the religious ideas and practices of the Indus people is difficult because their writings can not yet be read. A few beliefs can be inferred from the large-scale physical arrangements of the cities. Most of our clues to their religious ideas come from a few

clay and stone images and from the hundreds of personal seals found on the Indus sites. The short inscriptions on these seals might tell us much if we could read them, but as present we can glean in formation only from the beautiful pictorial designs cut in intaglio on the seals faces.

First we shall look for the meaning of one of the most striking characteristics of the remains of this civilization: the centuries-old uniformity of its artifacts, seen in every visible pattern of its life throughout all periods of this culture's sure existence of at least five hundred years. The Indus potters never altered the shape of their wares, and the complex alphabet already used by writers in the twenty-fifth century B.C. never was modified. The design of the culture's flat copper ax heads did not change. The outer boundaries of the Indus cities did not expand or contract, the thoroughfares were never relocated, and the house sites and the house outlines did not vary. What does this lack of change mean and what may we suppose about the thoughts of those who lived in this way?

In this highly organized society, such a complete avoidance of innovation must have been deliberate and enforced by social authority. Underlying this commitment to an unchanging life there must have been an exceptional reverence for the ways of the ancestors. Despite our almost total ignorance of their thought, we contemplate the historical sweep of their technical development and conclude that the Indus people regarded the heritage of their past as sacred and inviolable.

Another aspect of the physical culture that appears to be full of meaning is the scrupulous care with which it handdled water. In the citadel of Mohenjo-Daro, a seat of government, archaeologists have found not only an assembly hall and a granary but also a large bathing pool. The pool is flanked by many dressing rooms and imposing arcades and has broad steps for the safe descent of bathers into the water. Formal and solemn bathing must have been regarded as somehow essential to effective government.

Something of this vanished society's feelings about water is communicated to us by its superb hydraulic masonry. Quite

obviously, the Indus people believed that water either contained a power or liberated and preserved a power of such importance to human life that it had to be handled with great care. We propose that the ancient Indus people already entertained some of the standard Hindu notions of the metaphysical functions and purifying powers of water that were to prevail throughout later ages of Indian life. In later Hindu philosophical speculation, water is often the figure for the formless primary substance of original creation. In historical times, wells, pools, and streams have been believed to be the residences of divine beings, and waterside places have been the sacred destinations of religious pilgrimages. Bathing has been the principal means for removing contamination caused by contact with unclean substances and persons, and the great pool at the citadel of Mohenjo-Daro may have been the means by which rulers attained the purity deemed necessary for the performance of their high civic functions. On equally likely, bathing may have been a means by which the relatively unclean members of the general populace prepared themselves for contact with their aloof rulers who, as supervisors of the ancient heritage, shared something of the holiness of the heritage itself.

The study of the engravings on the Indus seals enables us to recover, again from nonverbal material, an aspect of religious feeling. The design of these seals is dominated by magnificent representations of animals. On many seals, figures of powerful bulls are seen; on others, a mysterious bovine unicorn, or tigers, rhinoceroses, antelopes, and elephants. The animals are always male, and free. Though the culture used bulls as draft animals, the beasts on the seals are never shown in harness or hitched to carts. All the animals have been carved with special attention to their mighty horns and flanks and with obvious awareness of their extraordinary strength. Before the impressive unicorn is always seen an unusual two-tiered stand believed to be an incense burner. The people whose minds dwelt on these creatures apparently perceived in them a superhuman power that they admired and wished to activate on their own behalf.

There also is evidence in the seals of a comparable power existing in plants. One seal shows a solitary tree amid whose branches a

three-horned goddess or god is seen. A suppliant approaches on bended knee, attended by a goatlike animal and assisted by seven persons in a formal row, wearing identical dress and coiffure. The tree can be identified by its leaf. It is India' sacred fig tree, the kind of tree under which the Buddha sat on the night of his enlightenment. It is still sacred in northern India as the holy *pipal* tree, which is never cut down by Hindu villagers.

The divine force seen in the tree was sometimes conceived in other forms. Among the clay figurines found in almost every house, the most common is a feminine figure whose large breasts and hips are indicators of fertility. So many of these figures lack lower extremities that it seems they were intended to appear to be partly submerged in the earth. Attached to the head of one such image is a cup in which oil or incense has been burned. Thus it appears that an earth-dwelling fertility figure, feminine in nature, was an object of worship.

The fertile earth is the center of attention again in a seal that seems to refer to the planting and germination of grain crops. On one side of the seal is an inverted nude figure from whose genital region a stalk of grain with a bearded head—or perhaps a tree-grows upright. There is not much doubt about the identity of this upside-down figure: it is the earth conceived as a fertile female person.

Pantheons that contain female deities are almost sure to include male forces as well. We have noticed the Indus religion's attention to male animals, in whom some degree of divinity can be assumed. A number of phalluses, or models of the male reproductive organ, have been found in the course of excavation. Their use is unknown, but it probably was cultic.

Several fascinating seals picture a male person seated in a manner that, as the "lotus posture," is fundamental in later India's meditative yoga. The figure in the seals has multiple faces pointing forward and to left and right in token of his divine, all-seeing powers. In one seal, the adoring posture of attendants on either side also suggest his divine status. In another, he is surrounded by animals of many kinds, and from the crown of his head two fronds

of vegetation spring as well. The origin of life is shown in a representation of the springing of plant and animal forms from the creative mind of a meditating deity.

Because this god of the Indus people is a *yogi* (a sage who practices yoga) and is seen with many animals, many scholars believe that the he was the prototype of the later Hindu god Siva, who is skilled in yoga, who is said to face in all directions, and who has the name of Pasupati, or Lord Beasts.

Some scholars believe that some kind of meditational yoga was already being practiced in this earliest Indian civilization. This evidence of the seals does not stand entirely alone. Other suggestions of yoga can be seen in an unusual stone bust found at Mohenjo-Daro—a representation of an adult human being of great dignity, in a posture that has yogic characteristics. He holds himsell erect with head. neck, and chest aligned in a posture unusual in Indus statuary but necessary in yoga. And the position of the eyes—closed to slits—is even more suggestive of yoga. The statue reveals the existence in the Indus culture of a type of leadership peculiar to India. His introspective habits are a part of his distinction and of his qualification for leadership. Already in this image we have an exemplar of the Bhagavadgita's ideal of the great man as "the sage of steady wisdom."

The seals show vegetable life springing from both goddesses and gods. Therefore, it would be remarkable if the religious leaders of this people did not unite these conceptions in a single theory of the creation of the universe through mythological interactions between these divine beings of the two sexes. And if the Indus thinkers were sophisticated enough to offer philosophical rather than mythological explanations of the begining of things they probably also conceived the world as formed by the analogy rather than the actuality of sex through the created interaction of two polar powers or essences. The Samkhya and the Sakta schools of later thought. Which trace the cossmos to the interfolw of such paired realities, could easily have had their beginnings here. But aside from suggesting the likelihood of a quasi-sexual dualism in their metaphysical thinking, we cannot say more about the philosophical

ideas of these people.

**Arrival of the Aryans**

Sometime between 1900 and 1600 B.C. the Indus civilization fell into disorder. Its great cities be came deserted mounds, first in the Indus Valley itself and, by 1500 B.C., in its southern border regions also. The cause of the collapse is not known. There were damaging floods during those centuries, and agriculatural failures, and a breakdown of municipal regulation can be seen in the anarchic irregularities of building practices in late Mohenjo-Daro. But the end of the culture is fairly close in time to the appearance on the northwest border, in about 1500 B.C., of an aggressive nonurban people, the Aryans. During the period when Aryan hordes are known to have been on the move in the Middle East in search of new homes, some of the Indus cities came to an end in slaughter or conflagration.

Even if the Aryans were not the direct destroyers of the Indus civilization, they were surely its successors. After a short time they became the dominant people of the Indian plains, living a quite different people of the Indian plains, living a quite diffferent style of life. The light-skinned Aryans were village dwellers who made their living by grazing cattle as well as by growing crops. The old, non-Aryan rural population was not eliminated, but it accepted the language of the conquerors and submitted to the dominance of their culture. The Aryans priests became the new civilization's cultural leaders, and the Aryan religion prevailed.

In time the new Aryan India became settled and populous again. Between 1000 and 500 B.C., cities rose again on the plains and became the fortified capitals of great kingdoms. Once more, agriculture become intensive and almost the sole livelihood the people. Surviving elements of the old religion again became relevant to the problems of a people who faced again India's persistent natural hazards and rigid social controls. After 500 B.C., the mainstream of Hinduism continued to be Aryan in name, but it became syncretistic in content. The role of the old indigenous material in this new composite religion was surely great, but its extent can not be estimated because the Indus religion is so poorly

known.

At this point we pass from inquiry into the almost unknown to the study of the almost known the Aryans and their religion.

**The Religion of the Vedas**

The Aryans are first mentaioned in Mesopotamian records of the period 1800 to 1400 B.C., during which time groups of Aryans were probably migrating also into Iran and northwestern India. Those who settled in India reveal themselves in a great body of oral literature composed and compiled by their priestly class between 1200 and 800 B.C. Whereas the religion of the Indus culture of known only from the material discoveries of archaeologists, the outlokk of the Aryans has been recovered for the Vedas, the oldest of the Aryans has been recovered from the Vedas, the oldest of the Hindu scriptures.

**The Culture of the Early Aryans**

In the Vedas we discerin a people who and had a lifesyle quite different from that of the Indus civilization. These early Aryans built no cities, and they were less advanced than their predecessors in most of the sciences and arts. They were superior to the Indus peoples in metallurgy and weaponry. however, and they were skilled in raising in raising horses and in using chariots in war. They grew grains in lands near their villages but they also kept large herds of grazing animals. The Aryans were divided into five tribes, each led by an independent chieftain who was responsible for defense and order. The people of all these tribes had a common ethnic identity but they were not united under a single political rule.

**The Vedas**

Though the Aryans had no system of writing when they entered India and remained illiterate for a long time, they brought with them from Iran a tradition of oral poetry and took exceptional delight in their language. By about 1200 B.C. certain groups of Aryan priests had devised methods of memorization to enable them to preserve carefully the poetry then in liturgical use. By about 800

B.C. their religious poetry had been gathered into four collections (*samhitas*) that are commonly known now as the four Vedas. Because the texts of the poems were as firmly settled at about this time as if they had been published by a press, we may speak of these Vedas as 'books,'' even though they were imprinted only on human memories and even to this day, are usually recited from memory rather than read. The entire vedic age, the period during which a single cult and its kiterature was dominant, dominant, ranged from about 1200 to 600 B.C. We shall focus on the nature of the religion at the time the samhtas were collected (about 800 B.C.) because that is when the vedic cult had its greatest following.

The Sanskrit in which early Hindu literature is written belongs to the Indo-European language family. The word Veda is a cognate of the English wit and wisdom and means "the (sacred) wisdom (of the Aryans)." By 800 B.C. three collections already had the satus and title of Veda: the Rigveda, Samaveda, and Yajurveda. The fourth collection, independent from these three in its origin and not yet quite established in its content, was already in existence and was soon to be titled the Atharvaveda. Each of these Vedas was preserved by a separate guild of priests.

**The Rigveda**

The Rigveda was the liturgical book of the *hotars*, an ancient order of Aryan priests who originally performed sacrifices without the cooperation of any other officiant. The Rigveda was formed over three or four centrures, during which time special assistants were asked to take over certain parts of the performance. These cooperating specialists developed liturgical manuals of their own, and the Rigveda continued its development thereafter as the hymnbook of the hotars alone. When various aspects of the performance became the responsibility of the assistants, it became the special function of the hotar to recite, at the beginning and at certain key turns in the ritual, one or more hymns in honor of the god or gods. Each verse of these hymns of the hotars was called a ric, or praise stanza. The term gave the collection its name: the Rigveda (the sacred wisdom consisting of stanzas of proaise). The Rigveda is made up of 1,028 hymns organized in ten divisions or

books. Though the Rigveda on the whole is the oldest of the Vedas, its tenth book was added only at the very end of our period, after the Samaveda and the Yajurveda had already come into existence.

**The Samaveda and the Yajurveda**

Compiled later than most of the Rigveda, the Samaveda is the anthology of a specialist in the musical aspects of the sacrificial ritual, called the *udgatar*, or singer. His *samans*, or songs, give this Veda its name. The text of the Samaveda consists almost entirely the verses selected dfrom the carlier books of the Rigveda, arranged in the order in which the singer needed them as he performed his duties at the ceremonies. The melodies to which the samans were originally sung are not known.

The Yajurveda came into existence at almost the same time, to serve the needs of another new participant in the ritual, the adhvaryu. It was his duty to make all the physical preparations for the rite and to carry out all necessary manipulations of its utensils and materials, as well as to move about muttering in a low voice certain shcrt incantations called *yajus* while making the offerings. A yajus is a short verbal formula, usually in prose, in which the priest asserts the meaning and purpose of the ongoing ritual acts in an effort to intensify their power and effectiveness. The yajus formulas give the Yajurveda its name. About half of them are fragments extracted from the Rigveda, and about half are new prose compositions.

**The Fourth Veda**

After the formation of the Samaveda and the Yajurveda, the Rigveda was completed with the addition of its tenth book. For a century or two there after there were believed to be three Vedas, but eventually the fourth collection which was thereafter called the Atharvaveda, was accepted as acripture.

The Atharvaveda is the collected poetry of the *atharvans*, a separate class of priests who originally had no part in the aristocratic ritual of the hotar udgatar, and adhvaryu, which we shall now have to distingush as the *srauta* rites. The atharvan of the vedic age was a practitioner in a humbler domestic setting, a

popular medicine man who aided individuals in their homes with rituals to alleviate personal and family crises. His rituals rituals were usually intended for times of illness, but the atharvan also had materials for protection against demons and sorcerers, spells for securing the affection of lovers and the birth of children, and incantations for luck in throwing dice and for the expiation of sins. Although the atharvan potery was collected later than the Vedas of the other three priests. It is poetry of a different professional circle rather than of different age.

The atharvans also lent their services to influential people. For priests they had spells to nullify the much feared consequences of blunders in performing the srauta sacrifices, and for royal patrons, they had spells to protect them in battle and to guarantee the security and prosperity of their rule. It must have been royal gratitude that enabled them to become, after the earliest period, the Aryan kings' household chaplains (*purohitas*), who supervised the ritual activities of the courts. This powerful office must have helped them gain, in time, their lasting position on the priestly staff that performed the dignified srauta sacrifices.

Even before the first three Vedas were completed, it had become customary to increase the priestly staff to four. The last was a silent supervisor called the *brahman*, who monitored and corrected the acts and utterances of the priests who used the Rigveda, Samaveda, and Yajurveda. The atharvans secured regular appointment to the office of supervising brahman, and them they became able to win recognition of their book as a Veda. It was not possible, however, to put it to liturgical use as a full equivalent of the other three Vedas. The atharvan's poetry had been composed for other purposes and remined in use in its own special sphere of human needs.

**The Vedic World View**

In the vedic age Hindu India was only beginning its history of serious philosophical reflection. The great Hindu systems of thought did not yet exist. Although some of the great metaphysical questions about humanity and the universe were beginning to be asked, the answers were diverse and undeveloped as seen in

opinions of the time on major topics of concern:

1. Humanity. What is the essence of the human being? The vedic age was content with commonsense answers, and its probings into the nature of humanity began with anatomical observations. Seeking that organ or bodily componennt that is indispensable to human life, a vedic observer perceived that when breath goes, life goes. The discussion of the life essence centered on several words that referred to breath or a similar airy substance believed to permeate the living body. *Vata,* the world wind, and *prana,* an internal aerial current of the body, are often spoken of as the basic animating principal. But the favorite term was *atman,* another word that is atmospheric in its connotations but less concrete in its reference. Atman was conceived as a subtle substance existing within the human body, yet separable from it. Atman is essential to one's being; it is one's soul. At death this subtle life-breath leaves the dody and rises in the updraft of the funeral pyre to *Svarga,* the heaven above the atmosphere.

The people of the vedic age expected to reach that lofty abode where song and the sound of the flute are heard, and to dwell there after death with their ancestors in eternal light. All were confident that correct behavior and faithfulness in ritual while on earth would enable them to pass through death to Svarga, where all that was best in earthly life would continue. They did not, however, dislike their earthly bodies or long to leave the earth. On the contrary, worshipers often petitioned the gods for life spans of a hundred years and for permanent life in a similar body in an ideal but comparable world. The vedic religious practices were meant to maximize the earthly life, not to replace it with existence on different leval of being.

2. *The universe.* The substance, structure, and origin of the universe did not receive in the vedic age any extended systematic discussion like that of later times. The philosophical satistaction of understanding the essence of the universe was not so important to the people of this age as the practical satisfaction of being able to control it. But several basic cosmological ideas were well developed and generally accepted.

3. *The triloka.* One of the commonest analytical conceptions of the Vedas is the understanding of the universe as *triloka*, or the three realms.These realms were understood to be three horizontal strata, one above the other. The lowest was the earthly realm, *prithiviloka*, the disk on which humanity lived and walked. The second was the realm of the atmosphere, *antarikshaloka*, in which birds flew and the chariots of the gods were sometimes seen. Its upper boundary was the vault of the sky, impenetrable by the flight of birds or the human eye. Above this vault was a realm of mystery and eternal light, *svargaloka*, the heavenly realm, which was believed to be the home of the gods and the refuge of the blessed dead. When Yama, the Hindu Adam, died, he discovered the path to svargaloka for all men who followed him in time.There, by right of seniority, he presides over the departed fathers of us all. It was Visnu, the god known as "The Preserver, "who established these great divisions when he strode out and marked off the entire universe in three of his giant paces.

4. *Rta, the basis of order.* All natural actions in this three- layered universe are governed by an impersonal principle called *rta*. Rta enables natural bodies to move rhythmically and in balance without undergoing the disorganizing and destructive effect otherwise implicit in motion. Because of rta we have a cosmos, an ordered universe that undergoes change without becoming chaos. By adhering to rta tha sun follows its daily path, setting but rising again and continuing to support the world with its light. The stars fade at dawn but twinkle again at dusk. Rta is a dynamic principle of order, manifesting itself in change, not in rigidity.

In social affairs, rta is the propriety that makes harmony possible in the actions of all living beings. In human speech rta is truth, and in human dealings it is justice. When rta is observed by human beings, order prevails and there is peace among individuals. In worship, rta is the pattern of correct performance. Right ritual maintains harmony between humanity and the gods, humanity and nature, and one person and another.

Rta is no thought to be the command of any divine being. The great vedic deity Varuna, the guardian of the cosmic order, is the special

guardian of rta. He punishes those who do not speak the truth or who commit improper actions. Not even Varuna, however, created the rta. All the gods are subject to it. Rta is a philosophical principle, an extremely ancient Indo-European abstract idea that from the beginning was independent of theology. In India the word rtà was eventually replaced by the term *dharma*, and the conception was modified somewhat, but the principal Indian orthodoxies still retain the original impersonality of Indian ethical theroy. In no other aspect of thought are the Indian religions more different from the Semitic religious traditions than in this one.

5. *The ultimate source of things.* The composers of the vedic literature addressed themselves only casually to the problem of the world's origin and final substance. Their tentative stories about cosmic beginning differed, though most of their speculations included two original entities: the gods, and some material stuff with which the deities worked. As to the nature of the materials the gods may have used, they had no settled answer. Rigveda 10.90 traces the main features of the world back to a great primeval sacrifice performed by the gods in which the body of a victim called Purusa (primal man) was dismembered, his limbs and organs being used to form the parts of the human and natural world. Whence this Purusa may have come and what he was are not explained.

Other speculators used the analogy of sexual procreation, saying that all things had been generated through the intercourse of the Sky-Father and the Earth-Mother, or by a single potent procreator. But the Vedas' scattered efforts to explain the origin of the world in terms of the vedic gods produced no generally acceptable cosmogony.

Vedic polytheism's speculations about the creation of the universe were a negative accomplishment, a realization that the devas, or gods, as they conceived them, could provide no answer. Each of the gods was understood to exist somewhere in nature, and many or most were defined by their association with some natural power. Conceptualized as a part of the natural world, the gods could not reasonably be understood to include the creator of the world of

which all gods were parts. Even those that were not nature gods were visualized as having spatial locations, and they suffered the same limitations.

A monotheistic solution to the problem of creation was not possible within the existing ideas about divinity. So when the question of ultimate origins was at last pursued seriously in some of the latest of the vedic hymns, the Indian mind turned from personal creators to impersonal processes.At that point a necessary conclusion was drawn: If the gods could not have preceded and created the essence fo things, then the essence to things must have preceded and given rise to the gods. After this conclusion was reached, impersonal treatments of the question of world origin became characteristic of Indian thought. One of the earliest and finest expressions of this tendency occurs in a hymn belonging to the last book of the Rigveda.

**A Hymn of Creation**

We are reminded of the first chapter of Genesis as we read the Hymn of Creation. Here, too, there is mention of primeval waters and a sense of the tantalizing mystery of an event so removed trom us that it is inaccessible to all the usual means of human knowing. As this daring venture of thought procedds, however, the Indian thinker's mind reveals its own distinctive tendency as it seeks to answer the question, "What moved on the face of that mysterious deep?" Whereas the Hebrew would reply, "In the beginning God...," the vedic poet considered the potentialities of all the gods and sought elsewhere for the aboriginal Reality:

*1..Nonbeing then was not, nor was there being;*
*there was no realm of air, no sky above it.*
*What covered them? And where?In whose protection?*
*And was there deep unfathomable water?*

*2. Death then existed not, nor the immortal;*
*sheen was there none of night and day.*
*Breathless That One breathed of its own nature:*
*aside from that was nothing whatsoever.*

*3. There was darkness hid in darkness at the outset;*

*an unillumined flood, indeed, was all this.*
*That Creative Force convered by the void,*
*That One, was born by the power of brooding.*

Contemplating the state that must have prevailed before the world existed, the seer stresses its otherness from all that is now familiar. Even the three realms (1b) had not yet been marked out. Neither mortals nor the gods were then there (2a), nor had day and night made their appearance (2b). Where were these things then hidden, and by what (1c)? That they were sunk away in a formless watery emptiness is first suggested tentatively (1d) and then asserted (3b). Life and being were represented in that primeval waste by solitary Creative Force, vital inasmuch as it breathed, and yet breathing as no living thing breathes now (2c). This single source of what had breath was not a personal God but a neuter It (2c). It was not even eternal but arose in the voidness of things through a natural incubating warmth or perhaps through the intense mental activity of unidentified meditatiors (3d).

*4. Desire came into it at the beginning–*
*desire that was of thought the primal offspring.*
*The tie of being in nonbeing found they,*
*the wise ones, searching in the heart with wisdom.*

*5. Transversely was their severing line extended—*
*what was there down below, and what was over?*
*There were begetters-mighty beings!—*
*fertile power below, and potency up yonder.*

Out of this pool of undeveloped life the actuality of living beings proceeded through the appearance of erotic desire and then of male and female procreators. The initiating factor again (3d) was power generated .by the introspection of meditators whose identity and origin are not explained (4d). In the hearts of these sages, thought gave rise to desire (4b), and this erotic urge became the cord, so to speak (4c), by which creatures were drawn up out of the formless abyss in which they had been hidden. This primal desire was the cord also by which the line of bisexual differentiation was drawn across the universe (5a), distinguishing creatures into interacting males and females of great creative power (5cd).

*6. Who really known? Who can here proclaim it?*
*Whence is it born? Whence is this creation?*
*The gods are later than this world's creation?*
*so who can know from what it came to being?*

*7. That from which this creation came to being,*
*whether created twas, or not created,*
*He who is its Overseer in highest heaven,*
*He only knows-or He may know not!*

Here the author confesses that his picture of these remote events is not based on the knowledge of witnesses (6a); the gods, the most ancient of all knowing beings, are themselves the products of these processes and cannot testfiy to the beginning of things (6c). But the author is not sure that even a supreme god, the present ruler of creation, is old enough to be able to bear witness to that time (7d). His only confidence is that all life proceeded from a single divine source, which must have been of a nonphenomenal nature. Though persons were derived from it, it in itself was no different from everything known that it can be called only "That One."

At the end of the Vedas, many foundations were laid for the later Hindu monistic doctrine called the Vedanta, though the Vedanta system as a whole did not yet exist. For instance, in this hymn the One is not eternal byt arose in time (3d).There is no suggestion that the world's generation was a devolution rather than a realization of being, and there is no religious longing to return to That One. The question of salvation is not raised.

**The Devas or Vedic Gods**

Each hymn of the Rigveda is intended for use in the worship of one or more of the superhuman beings called *devas.* The names of these various gods of the Aryan pantheon appear throughout the texts of the Vedas. They had a central position in ritual and in vedic religion as a whole. In the mind of Aryan worshipers of the time, religion was the approaching of the devas, and if we can understand the meaning of these vedic deities, then we can understand the heart of vedic religion.

Deva is a word derived from the noun *div* (sky), an analysis of

which in turn suggests a place of shining radiance. Thus that term deva implies that beings so named belong to the lumunous heavens. When the vedic poets reflect on the place of the gods, they share an ancient Indo-European supposition that a celestial abode is normal to them. But the other two *lokas*, 'or spheres, are not excluded as possible residences of many of the deities. The gods of rain and wind, for instance (Parjanya and Vayu or Vata), dwell in the atmoshphere; Soma is a god of the earthly realm; and Agni, or divinized fire, resides in all three spheres—earth, atmosphere, and heaven. Each god has a traditional residence in one of the realms, and all members of the pantheon are classified formally according to the realm that is their residence. This classification makes it clear that the gods are thought of as existing somewhere in nature as parts of the natural order, not its source.

Most of the vedic gods can be understood as halfpersonalized conceptions of the powers that underlie the various dramatic and vital aspects of the natural world. The god Vata is the power of the wind. Vata has been depicted as a bearded figure in a running pose. His loose hair flies backward in wild strands, and he clings tightly to the corners of his billowing cloak. Likewise, the vedic poet who speaks of the presence of Agni has in mind the physical presence of fire, whether in a luminous heavenly body or in atmospheric lightning or on the ritual altar. Parjanya is addressed in language applicable to rain and is identified by rain. Surya is the sun and is identified with the actual solar disk that traverses the sky. Pusan is the sun's light as the revealer of paths and locator of lost things. When the priest in the morning sacrifice faces Usas the goddess of the dawn, it is the dawn itself that he faces as he sings:

*We see her there, the child of heaven, apparent,*
*the young maid, flushing in her shining raiment.*
*Thou mistress of all earthly riches.*
*flush on us here, auspicious Dawn, this morning.*

Even Indra, a complex deity whose basic martial character was shaped by the migrating Aryans' pre-Indian experiences, achieved a special importance in India because of his new connection there rain. Indra was always a deity of conflict, and now, in India, his

one remembered combat is his great fight with the demon Vrtra the Withholder, that is, the withholder of the waters. Assuming that gods operate or can operate in some sphere of nature, India has invoked this great Aryan fightergod against the land's most threatening enemy, the evil force that withholds the monsoon.

The worshiper's petitions that one finds in the vedic hymns reveal the extent to which the gods are understood to control aspects of nature. More than reverence is involved. The adorers hope to appropriate for their own needs the extraordinary powers whose presence they apprehend. The poetpriests are quite frank in seeking material boons. In the hymn to Dawn, the composer has not fainled to notice that the goddess, as the initiator of each day's hope-filled work, is the auspicious controller of the earth's treasures. A companion hymn to the samd deity is explicit in its appeal for help in attaining material success:

*Mete out to us, O Dawn, largesses: offspring,*
*brave men, conspicuous wealth in cows and horses.*

In other hymns we find that such requests are not exceptions, but the rule. For example, the prayer to Pusan in addressed to his particular function as a guiding light:

*Lead us to pastures rich in grass,*
*Send on the road no early heat.*
*Thus, Pusan, show in us thy might.*

In the characterizations of the vedic gods, allusion to natural forces is constant. To a great degree, the worship of the gods can be seen to be an effort to live successfully amid the awesome nonhuman forces of the natural world.

This insight does not elucidate the entire vedic pantheon, however, nor is it a key to the concerns of all vedic religion. Particularly. the natralistic explanation cannot be applied successfully to Indra and Varuna, two of the most important deities. Indeed, these two gods are mentioned mainly in connection with activities that are human and social rather than natural. If we can understand them, we can also understand how the naturalistic explanation of the vedic gods must be supplemented.

Indra is called the chief of the gods, and the fact that fully one-fourth of the Rigveda's hymns are dedicated to him confirms his importance in Aryan life. But Varuna is called the foremost of the gods in almost the same terms. Both hold the high title of *Samraj*, or Supreme Ruler, and when one of the two is referred to as such, the other is addressed in similar terms. Together, the two form a cooperating pair of rulers whose authority is somehow complementary and comprehensive in its coverage of some important field. Taken jointly, they comprise an authority that is the Vedas' nearest approach to that of a monotheistic God.

But neither Indra's nor Varuna's importance rests on a connection with any vital aspect of the natural world. A seat in nature has been allotted to each of them, it is true. Varuna's place is the vault of the sky, and he is conceived as being present also in bodies of water. But he is by no means a personification of the sky, nor are his acts mythologizations of natural occurrences in the sky. The sky is only the vantage point from which Varuna surveys the deeds of human beings, and he is a water god only to the extent that hs inflicts on humans diseases of the bodily fluids as punishments for offeness aganist truth and right. His connections with nature are too formal and superficial to give him his vast importance among the gods. His actual functions are exerciesd in another field.

The Indra of the Rigveda has a dramatic connection with the rain clouds in the single myth of his combat with Vrtra. But Indra is in no sense a personification of rain or clouds, nor is his connection with rain old or significant in the delineation of his character. He is not a rain-giving god in any other of his known acts; his battle with the demon of drought is an isolated encounter. The established field of his operations can be found in the Vedas' references to all his other known activities and in our information about the pre-Indian cult of this god as a deity of the Aryans in Iran and Iraq. In Iran, where Indra was known as Verethragna, he is explicitly a military god. This pre-Indian Indra is remembered and pictured, even a thousand years later, on a gold coin of the Emperor Kanishka. Indra is seen in his original character as the total warrior, in full armor, eagle- crested, and carrying both a sword and a spear. He is the Aryan battle god, a personification of the ideal powers

and virtues of the Aryan warrior class.

Unlike Varuna, the Indra of the Rigveda has nothing to do with morality, either in function or in character. Vedic mythology portrays him as a ruffian from birth: an unfilial son, a lecherous youth, and a gluttonous, drunken, and boastful adult. After consuming offerings of thousands of buffalo and after steeling his courage by dranking lakes of intoxicants, Indra lurches off to the wars and there assists his people. He protects them from the power of alien peoples and from demons that cause other gods to flee in terror. His domain is the hazardous area of his worshipers' relations with hostile outside forces. It is enough that he is immensely strong and makes the warrior class effective on the battlefield.

Varuna is equal to Indra in rank, but there the similarity ends. Whereas Indra represents the force of arms at the community's boundaries, Varuna, his co-ruler, is a force for order who defends the rta and guards the harmony of internal social life. His omnipresent spies examine the truth and justice of what men do, and Varuna catches the offenders with his bysterious noose and punishes them with disease. Whereas Indra's favor can be bought with offerings of meat and libations of strong drink, Varuna will accept only truthful speech and upright behavior. As guardian against anarchy, Varuna is the celestial patron of earthly kings, the legitimizer of their authority, and the chief deity addressed in the Aryan coronation ceremony.

Natural danger is not the focal problem in the worship of either Indra or Varuna. These two deal, each in his own area, with the dangers raised by the turbulence of human beings, some disrupting the community from outside and some from within. Vedic religion does not deal with natural insecurities only. Like other religions, it addresses its adherents' most acute imsecurities, of whatever kind.

The worship of the vedic gods is directed toward three types of insecurity and three kinds of power. The first insecturity is natural insecurity: the danger of natural injury, disease, and want. In this area vedic worshipers supplemented normal human efforts by invoking the many nature gods and by resorting to the atharvans more impersonal rituals. The second insecurity is moral insecurity.

created by destructive individualism within the community itself. In the face of such danger, Varuna is worshiped as the guardian of the rta, the punisher of antisocial behavior, and the patron of the administration of legitimate kings. The third insecurity is military insecurity, as found in the Aryans relations with alien political groups. Here the vedic worshipers called out to a god of unbounded force seeking support and a rallying point in the lawless enterprise of war. In theis area, they worshiped Indra, just as in economic need they worshiped the nature gods and for social stability they worshiped Varuna.

The gods of the Veda have varying moral natures. Varuna is a highly moral deity, whereas nature gods like the solar Savitar are amoral, and Indra as a personification of Aryan might is not moral at all. Because Western religions are now highly specialized in efforts to cope with the moral crises of modern societies, many Western students may find it difficult to understand how vedic worshipers were able to revere any of these deities save Varuna. They should remember that most religions, in the past and even now, address a wide range of insecurities. Vedic religion was as broad in its scope as the anxieties of its people.

**Rituals of the Vedic Age**

Religious practices often further dimensiions of a faith. In the rituals of the vedic age, there were three distinct types of ceremony; the family rites of the domestic hearth, the atharvan rithes, and the great srauta sacrifices. We shall attempt to describe the way they may have been practiced in about 800 B.C., a central period in the development of vedic religion. For most of our information we must work backward from literature written several centuries later. These sources are poor in quantity and quality for the first two rituals, but they tell us much about the great srauta sacrifices.

**Family Rites of the Domestic Hearth**

The father of the Aryan family performed daily rites at the domestic hearth for the welfare of all the members of his household. With the kitchen fire as his alter, he made libations of

milk and offerings of food. These oblations were accompanied by short liturgies which have not survived. Though little is known about these rituals, they were probably simpler forms of the domestic practices recorded later in the *Grihya Sutras* of about 600 B.C. This tradition of family ritual in its continuing evolution produiced the formal rituals of Hindu personal life, including the important rites of passage called *samskaras.*

**Rites of the Atharvans**

At times of personal or family crisis, when hostile powers were believed to threaten, an atharvan was called in to perform a special ceremony at the family hearth. The early sections of the Atharvaveda contain representative spell and incantations of these "medicine men." The following are examples of the liturgical verses that atharvans recited in efforts to dispel several kinds of illness:

*Born in the night art thou, O herb,*
*Dark-coloured, sable, black of hue;*
*Rich-tinted, tinge this leprosy*
*And stain away its spots of grey!*

*Just as the sun-god's shooting rays*
*Swift to a distance fly away,*
*So even thou, O Cough, fly forth*
*Along the ocean's surging flood.*

Little is known about the ritual manipulations of these priests other than what we can read between the lines, but it is apparent that the atharvan was often a priestly physician who administered herbal medicines while reciting his spells. He could also frustrate the curses of hostile sorcerers, and perform rites to conciliate enemies and to resolve quarrels between families and villages. By invoking the gods, the atharvan sought to bring into play a magical rather than a personal force. The names of the gods were uttered because the names themselves were thought to have power, not because the personal intervention of superhuman beings was sought.

### The Srauta Rites

These dignified and sonorous sacrifices were in later times called the sratua rites because they were the main concern of the *sruti,* that is, the Veds. This ritual also was focused on a sacred fire—not that of the hearth in a private home but one or several fires especially kindled nearby in a outdoor setting. Originally the officiant was a single priest, but by 800 B.C., a priestly staff of four was customary.

Many kinds of srauta rites were devised for special occasions and purposes. The rajasuya sacrifice, for example, was a ritual for the ceremonial installation of a new king, and the *asvamedha,* or horse sacrifice was used by kings to challenge any who might contest the boundaries of their realms. The modest *agnihotra* sacrifice was performed in citizens' homes at dawn or dusk in honor of Agni as the god of fire and the patron of the house and family. In the *agnishtoma* sacrifice the gods were offered their ambrosial drink, with much pouring and splashing and dripping, in hope of inducing downpours of rain.

In view of the great variety of rites that had developed as early as 800 B.C., it is not possible to offer a single description that is true to the reality of all. The box on the previous pages presents a general picture of these ceremonies, formed of elements found in many sacrifices.

### The Brahmans and Srauta Sutras

Beginning around 800 B.C., the priests of the srauta sacrifices began to create compositions called Brahmans, which were loose commentaries on the srauta sacrifices intended for use in the education of apprentice priests. Brahmanas were composed in great numbers over a period of several centuries by teaching members of the priestly guilds.

After the apprentice priests had learned to recite correctly the Veda of their particular guild, the lectures now recorded in the Brahmanas furnished them with the supplementary information that was deemed essential: the interpretation of obscure passages in the hymns; how to avoid certain common errors in the performances;

and the extraordinary powers available through each ritual, especially as performed with full knowledge of its hidden symbolisms by the skillful and learned priests of the particular guild involved. The Brahmanas set forth for the first time the view that the effectiveness of the sacrifice arose from the skill and knowledge of the priests rather than from the intervention of the gods.

Not intended to serve as manuals of performance, the Brahmanas provide only patchy information about the way the sacrifices were carried out. In about 600 B.C., however, such manuals did begin to appear, written in a terse new literary form called the *sutra.* In easily memorized prose outlines, the *Srauta Sutras* give detailed instructions for performing the rites. By collating the sutras of the principal officiants, modern scholars have reconstructed the actions involved in the rites as they were practiced shortly after 600 B.C., and on the basis of this information, we can surmise what the simpler rituals of an earlier time were like.

**Aims and Means in Srauta Ritual**

The liturgies of the srauta rites reveal clearly what the sacrificers hoped to attain. They sought earthly benefits for themselves as individuals living here and now. Occasionally a king or a family head sought boons that would benefit their subjects or family members as well as themselves. At the horse sacrifice, for example, a king made the following petition:

*May the cow be rich in milk, strong*
*the draught ox, swift the steed, fruitful the*
*woman, eloquent the youth. May a hero be born to the*
*sacrificer. May Parjanya grant rain at all time according to our desire. May the corn ripen.*

The values of vedic worshipers were practical and worldly ones, and the gods were generally regarded as favorably inclined toward dwellers on the earth. The sacrificers hoped to live a full life to a satisfying age. They expected to find acceptance in an enduring celestial home. That happy life hereafter did nto preoccupy them, however; they were in no hurry to attain it. Their striving was for

the improvement of this life, not its replacement.

How were the sacrifices believed capable of producing these benefits? In vedic times there was a duality of views. The hymns in the earlier part of the Rigveda are quite personalistic in their conception of the operation of the rituals. The ceremonies were designed to delight and stir powerful beings who could be expected to respond as pleased persons do, with actions helpful to the worshiper.

As time went by, certain weaknesses in the older theological beliefs became apparent and many priestly thinkers took a less personal view of the gods and the sacrifices. The cosmologist who composed the Hymn of Creation in about 800 B.C. was unable to believe that any of the nature gods existed at the time the natural universe was formed or could have been the initiating force in its creation. Already in this hymn, Indian speculation was shifting toward the conception that an impersonal Being was the cause of the phenomenal world.

Another weakness of polytheistic naturalism appeared when the Indians began to analyze the relationships among the various gods. Persons by their very nature are distinct from one another. But Surya, as the sun, could not be kept apart from the other deities that shared in the solar function, such as Usas (dawn), Pusan, Mitra, and Savitar, or even other sources of light such as Agni, the god of fire. Rain, wind, and flood also intermiagle, and thus the nature gods overlapped, interlocked, and became mere aspects of a universally pervasive force whan subject to mature consideration. Under this pressure the outhor of Rigveda 1.164.46 revised the traditional vedic conception of the gods as actual persons:

*They call it Indra, Mitra, Varuna,*
*And it is the heavenly noble-winged Garutman;*
*The Real is one though sages speak of it in many ways—*

*They call it Agni, Yama, Matarisvan.*

If the personal gods were seen as only the superficial appearances of an impersonal power, then what is to be believed about the reason for the effectiverness of rites in their honor? No one doubted

the value of the sacrifices, but Hindus began to belive that their efficacy lay in the technical processes of the rites themselves, rather than in their influence upon divine persons. In this new impersonal view, the sacrificers' business was to understand and control hidden connections between elements of the ritual and cosmic powers that bore the names of gods. Late vedic hymns reflect this intent to manipulate those external forces in statements like "This fire is yonder moon" or "This soma is the sun" Such identifications have puzzled outsiders, who regard them as arbitrary and fantastic. We should note, however, that one of the terms in such equations refers to a cosmic power controlling a vital natural process and the other term refers to something near at hand that is under the control of the performing priest. By manipulating the elements in the small world of the ritual, the priest tried to manipulate the forces controlling the outer universe. If the moon-shaped sacrificial fire pit, glowing with coals, was indeed the moon, then the skillful priest, while tending the fire, could influence by his manipulations the cyclic movements of the moon, and thus the passage of time, and could gain for his patron a longer life. Similarly, if soma had secret association with the sun (because of the red crown of the soma plant or the golden color of the liquid), then through the ritual handling of soma one might ensure success in growing the season's crops.

In theirsearch for power through the external connections of aspects of their ritual, the priests became fascinated with powers that might be exercised even through an outreach of their rituals' words. All people perceive that their words correspond to external realities, and structure them, and sometimes cause things to come into existence. Thus it came to be believed that the awesome words of the vedic hymns could have marvelous effects upon aspects of the outer world to which the words referred, and if words referring to small individual things could give one limited and particular powers, words of wider reference could yield more comprehensive powers. An obsession arose in the minds of the ritualists that there might be a word of all-embracing reference that would give them access to power over all things.

In this connection, there arose in the late vedic age a fascination

with the term *Brahman.* It meant at first a vedic prayer or a holy spell, but in time it came to mean all such liturgical utterances collectively and the Vedas themselves as the comprehensive formulation of powerful sacred sounds. And since Brahman referred to collectivity of ritual words, it was assumed to have ties with the entirety of natural phenomena. By the end of the vedic age, it became a favorite term for the source and moving essence of the whole universe. Thus, "That One" of the Creation Hyman found its historic name in Brahman. In discussing Brahman, the priests had in mind practical and not merely philosophical needs. Their doctrine of Brahman as the cosmic Absolute arose in connection with their efforts to exert influence on all parts of the universe and to cope with all crises of human existence through ritual.

In vedic religion the worshipers' own identity with Brahman was not important, nor was any transfer of their being to the level of Brahman involved in their understanding of final salvation. Rather, their speculation about Brahman was the climax of an effort to ensure a successful earthly life. Since the gods could no longer be approached as persons, the worshipers sought mastery over the forces that controlled their lives by manipulating microcosmic extensions of those forces that had been discovered in the ritual. Brahman—the most comprehensive of these correspondents—was to them a mystic verbal symbol by which the whole universe coald be moved.

**The Vedas in Later Hinduism**

The vidic religion had compiled its scriptures and established its practices by 800 B.C. Over the next two conturies, this cult achieved great currency. But by 600 B.C., disillusion had begun in many segments of the population. Those elements of the population who were still loyal to pre-Aryan cultural patterns recovered some of their power and prestige. In direct challenge to the brahman priesthood. Jainism and Buddhism arose as independent religions. The followers of these new religions rejected the materialitic goals and the bloody sacrifices of the vedic rituals. But even those who remained attached to the Vedas criticized the animal sacrifices and

became indifferent to the worldly gains promised by the vedic priests. Though few questioned the effectiveness of the sacrifices in producing the promised ends, many doubted the ultimate value of the boons ordinarily promised. Many members of the priestly guilds became increasingly fascinated by the mystical contemplation of Brahman as an ommnipresent and omnipotent power.

During the sixth century B.C. the old vedic religion was in decline and a new Hinduism was emerging, which will be the subject of the next chapter. Nonetheless, come aspects of the vedic tradition have survived to the present day. The ability to perform the ancient sacrifices has never completely disappeared. There are brahmans even now who can recite the Vedas from memory. Scholars of the *karma-mimamsa* school have continued to debate the problems of correct performance of the rites. Periodically Hindu political leaders have revived the rites as an ancient sancition of their rule or as a symbol of their loyalty to indigenous custom. Study of the Vedas has remained the most honored form of Hindu scholarship.

Although today almost all Hindu Indians follow religious practices that originated after the vedic period, they have not rejected the services of the ancient priesthood. As the old priestly guilds died out, new organizations were formed of brahmans who were willing to serve as priests of new religious movements and to preserve their vast new literatures. The brahman leaders of these newer moverments presented them as extensions of the vedic tradition rather than revolts against the Vedas. Although the Upanishads, which will be discussed in a subsequents chapter, reflect a new religious faith with its own approach to the problems of life, they are understood to be a continuation and clarification of the vedic tradition. For the reason they are referred to as the Vedanta (End) of the Vedas). The term extends recogintion to the Upanishads as the last literary installation of the Veda and as revealed scripture (sruti) of the highest order.

In time. Hinduism produced radically new scriptures such as the Hindu epics and Puranas, which are strikingly different in teaching from the Vedas. Such texts, too, won a place among Hindu sacred

compositions, as necessary human recastings of the message of the vedic revelation. Written by historic authors, they belong to human tradition (smriti) rather than to vedic revelation (sruti), but they are understood to be faithful restatements with few errors, of the meaning of the revealed books. Very few currents within the broad and diversified river of Hinduism have flaunted a hostility toward the Vedas. In intention. Hinduism is still vedic, and *Vaidika* dharma, the vedic religion, remains one of the terms most widely approved by modern Hindus for the identification of their faith.

**Ekanetra** (*one-eyed*)

Minor deity. Hindu (Epic and Puranic) One of a group of emanciapted *vidyesvaras* (lords of knowledge) vidyesvaras (lords of knowledge) considered to be aspects of Siva. Virtually identical with Ekarudra, but woth a single eye.

**Ekarudra**

Minor deity. Hindu (Epic and Puranic) One of a group of emancipated vidyesvaras (lords of knowledge) considered to be aspects of Siva. Virtually identical with Ekaneta, but with normal eyes.

**Ellaman** (*lady of the boundary*)

Goddess of passage. Hindu-Dravidan (Tamil) southern India). A goddess guarding boundaries of villages and fields. One of the *navasakti* or astral deities. Also Ellaiyamman.

# F

**Fasts and Festivals in Grishma: Jyaishtha-Ashadha**

India can boast of six seasons, while most other counteries have simply four. For the Hindus the Seasons have been sacred and they have frequently been personified, addressed in Mantras and hymns, and worshipped by libations in our ancient literature like Vedes, Mahabharata, etc. Seasons mark the appropriate time for sacrifices, worship, auspiciousness and other ceremonial activities. Jyaishtha and Ashadha are the two months of Grishma, or hot season. During Grishma, the whole Earth looks engaged in tapas, as its were. During Jyaishtha the full moon stands in the constellation Jyaishtha, and during Ashadha in the constellation Ashadha. In the words of Kalidas:

Pitiless heat from heaven pours
By day, but nights are cool;
Continual bathing gently lowers
The water in the pool;
The evening brings a charming peace:
For summer time is here.
That on the after wake;
The sunbeams like the fires are hot
That enmity is quite forgot
Of peacock and of snake;
The peacocks spares his ancient foe
For pluck and hunger fail;
He hides his burning head below
The shadow of the tail.
Beneath the garland of the rays

That leave no corner cool,
The water vanishes in haze
And leaves muddy pool;
The cobra does not hunt for food
Nor heed the frog at all
Who finds beneath the serpent's hood
A sheltering parasol

Man is Man in and with his Seasons. He has composed poems and hymns in praise of seasons, His environs and its science is sacred to him. The Summer months offer him the gift of such festivals as Vata Savitir, Ganga Dussehra, Nirjala Ekadashi, Ratha Yatra, Guru Purnima and others, when he with a sense of beatitude reaffirms his faith and devotion in his creator by observing certain rituals, vows, feasts and festivites. It is an expression of a music within, which, so well harmonizes with the universal symphony of creation without.

**Vata Savitri**

The fast of Vata Savitri is observed generally on the 13th day of the dark fortnight of Jyaishtha, but at some places it is also observed on Jyaishtha Purnima. It is meant only for the married women. The Hindu married women keep this vow for the sake of longevity and well-being of their husbands.

The story of Savitri and Satyavan is well-known. According of the scriptures, Savitri, the daughter of King Aswapati, was the lover of Satyavan, whom she marred, though the was warned by a seer that Satyavan had only one year to live. On the fated day Satyavan went out to cut wood, and Savitri followed him like his own shadow. There Satyavan fell, dying to the earth, and she, as she supported him, saw a figure, who told her that he was Yama and he had come to fetch her husband's soul Yama carried off his soul towards his abode of death, but Saviri followed him. Her devotion so pleased Yama, the god of death, that he had to finally restore her husband's life. Like Savitri it is the desire of every Hindu woman never to die as a widow.

Vata is a sacred tree among the hindus. On that day Savitri had worshipped the Vata (Banyan tree). So, on this day women get up

early in the morning and having bathed they go to worship the Vata in groups and in gay raiments. They ceremonially water the tree, sprinkle red powder on it, raw cotton threads are wrapped round its trunk, and then they go seven times round it to do parikrama.

On returning home they paint a Vata on the sanctified wall with turmeric powder and sandal and offer it prayer and worship. After breaking fast, fruits, clothes and such other articles are given in charity in a bamboo basket to the brahmins. They repeat the story of Satyavan Savitri among themselves and pray for the prosperity and good health of their husbands.

**Jaishtha Ashtami**

This festival is scelebrated on the 8th day of the bright half of Jyaishtha (May—June), at Khir Bhawani, in Kashmir. To celebrate this birthday festival of the goddess, people from the adjoining hill areas assemble in large number at the shrine and offer prayers and worships at the lotus feet of the goddess. Milk Khir (rice boiled in milk) is prepared on this day as a naivaidya (food offering). The hill-folk sing hymns and songs in praise of Bhawani.

Khir Bhawani is the personal goddess of the Kashmiri Hindus and hundreds of them visit the shrine daily. This beautiful marble shrine stands amidst a pool, formed by spring waters, which change colours-rosy, red, turquoise green, lemon pale, sky blue, milky white or pure white from time to time. It is 25 kms. from Srinagar, and 5 kms. from Ganderbal.

**Ganga Dussehra**

On the 10th day of the bright half of Jyasishtha, this festival is celebrated. On this tithi Ganga descended on the earth on Wednesday and in Hashta Nakhsatra. Literally Dussehra means that which takes away ten sins. People get up early in the morning and go to the Ganges to have a holy dip. When ganga is not approachable because of distance, they bathe in some nearby tank, pool, river or the sea, chanting "Har Har Gange! Har Gange!" Thus, they invoke Ganga, and offer her prayers and worship. At such places as Rishikesh, Hardwar, Garh Mukteshwar, Prayag, Varanasi, etc., where Ganga flows, its banks are over crowded on

this day. A bath in Ganga on this auspicious day is a great exercise in earning religious merit. It causes washing ways of all the sins.

The very name of Ganga is sacred to the Hindus. Its water is kept in sealed pots in the homes, which never gets polluted even if it is kept for years together The holy Ganga water thus kept is used on sacred days in sanctifying places and is taken as charnamrit. It is also given to the dying person with tulsi (basil) leaves to facilitate his leaving the body in peace. Ganga, the eldest daughter of Himavan and Mena, and sister of Parvti, was married to the gods in heaven, but was later on brought down to the earth by great tapas of Bhagiratha, grandson of Sagara, the king of Ayodhya. Sagara of the famous solar race was a powerful king, but had no sons Sagara propitiated Aurva and got a boon from him to the effect that he would have one son from his first wife Kesini, and 60 thousand from Sumati, the second wife.

Sagara decided to perform the Ashvamedla or the horse sacrifices as a sign of universal domain, and planned to dethrone Indra. But Indra drove the sacrificial horse to the nether worlds (Patal loka), Although it was gurarded by the 60 thousand sons. They reached there searching the horse and found it grazing near sage Kapila, seated in deep samadhi. They thought that Kapila had stolen their horse, they menaced him and disturbed his meditation. It enraged the rishi and he at once reduced them to asheas with his fierce glance.

Sagara now sent his grandson Anshuman to find out what had happened to his 60 thousand uncles Anshuman approched Kapila with great humility and it pleased him so much that he granted him a boon to the effect that his uncles would be restored to life if the holy Ganges could be made to descend on earth and flow over the ashes of 60 thousand. Kapila allowed Anshuman to return with the horse and the Ashvamedha was completed.

Sagara, and his son Anshuman and then his grandson Dilipa, all practised great tapas in succession, but could not make Ganga come down to the earth, however, Bahgiratha, the son of Dilipa, proved a very powerful ascetic and he performed such an extraordinary topas that brahma had to order Ganga to descend to

the earth.

Ganga came down to earth reluctantly and Shiva took her on his matted locks in order to avoid the danger of Ganga's fury. Ganga descended from the tangled locks of Shiva in seven streams, but it disturbed the sage Jahnu in his meditations, and so, he in anger drank up the water, but relented and allowed it to flow from his ear. Heance, Ganga is also known as Jahnvi. Ganga followed the chariot of Bhagiratha and entered into the nether regions, where her sacred water flowed over the ashes of 60 thousand princes. It revived all the princes and they then ascended to the heaven. Thus Ganga is said to water the three worlds.

Besidess Ganga Dussehra many other grand bathing festivals are held on the banks of Ganga. Many of our big and holy cities are situated on its banks.

**Nirjala Ekadashi**

Ekadashi is a very sacred day and so fast is observed on every eleventh day of the bright and dark half of the month. The eleventh day of the moon is especially set apart for devotional excercises and fasting. It is a day dedicated to the worship of Vishnu. The Vishnu and Markandeya Puranas give dtailed benefits flowing from the observance of Ekadashi Vratas and vowe. It is believed that Lord Vishnu transformed himself into Ekadashi to redeem the mankind from sins. If is a day of the days since it is looked upon as Lord Hari himself.

In all 24 Ekadashi fasts are observed in a year, but there are some Ekadashi which are relatively of greater significance. Nirjala Ekadashi is one of these. Not only complete fast is observed on this day (Jyaishtha Sudi 11) but even water is not taken at all. Both men and women observe strict fast and offer puja to Vishnu to ensure happiness. prosperity and forgiveness of transgressions and sins. On the preceding day that is on the 10th lunar day; Sandhya is performed and only one meal is taken. In the evening Vishnu is worshipped holding some durva grass in the hand. The night is spent in mediatation and prayer. On Ekadashis rice eating is totally prodhibited.

During the Nirjala Ekadashi Panchamrata is prepared by mixing together milk, ghee, curds, honey and sugar, and then offered to the image of Vishnu or poure over the Shaligram. Then, the deity is adorned with rich raiments, ornaments and jewels and a fan is placed beside it. Then Vishnu is meditated upon as the Supreme Lord of the Universe and puja is done with flowers, lamps, water, incense, etc.

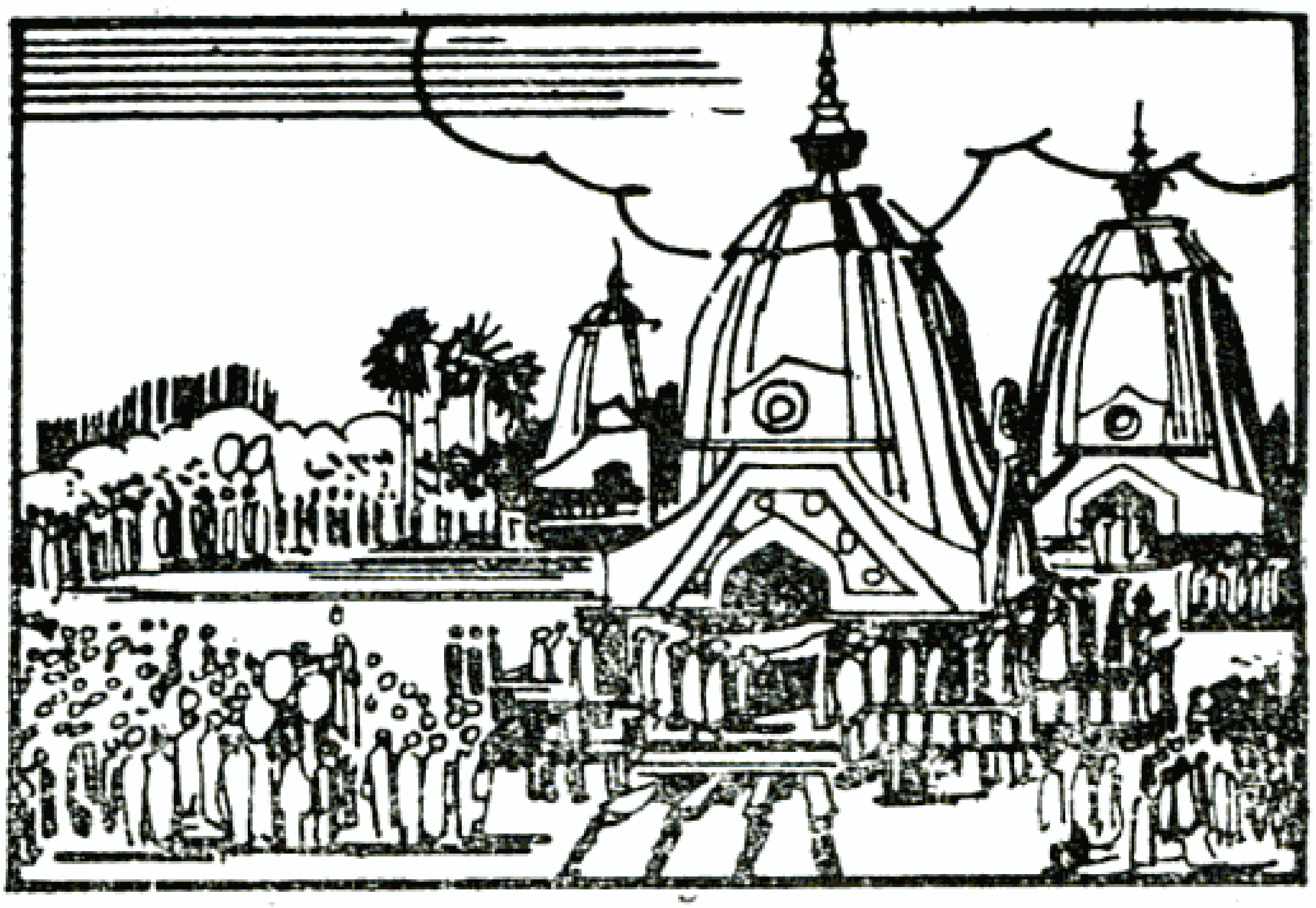
The faithful observance of the fast and other rituals on this day ensures happiness, salvation, longevity and prosperity. After the completion of the vow clothes, grains, umbrellas, fans, pitchers filled with water, etc., are given in charity to the Brahmins according to ones means and capacity. In Jyaishtha it is very hot and the day is long, and so observing fast, without even taking a drop of water from dawn to dusk, means a great act of piety and austerity. Ekadashi vow and vigil enhances mental equipoise, tolerance and spiritual powers and grants great religious merit both here and hereafter.

**Snan Yatra** (*Bathing Festival*)

On Jyaishtha Purnima (full moon day of May-June) a grand bathing festival is held in Orissa. On this auspicious occasion the images of Lord Jagannath, Balbhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshan are brought in a grand procession to the bathing platform of their ceremonial annual ablutions. With the recitation of the mantras from the Vedas, 108 pots of consecrated waters are poured upon the dities. Then the deities are attired ceremonially in "Gaja Visha", before they retire into seclusion for fifteen days called "Anavasara Period". It is an occasion of great rejoicing and merry-making.

**Ratha Yatra**

On the second day of the bright half of Ashadha (June-July), Ratha Yatra is celebrated throughout the country, and chariot procession of Sri Jagannath (Lord or the Universe) and taken out through the main markets and streets. But the main festival is held at Puri in Orissa. The Car Festival of Puri is famous all over the world and thousands of devotees from the country and abroad participate in



this most spectacular religious event. The 12th century imposing Jagannath shrine, 60 kms from Bhubaneshwer, is situated on Nilachala mountain. It is one of the four great holy places. The other three are Badrinath, Dwarka and Rameshwaram.

For a devout Hindu, a pilgrimage to Jagannath Puri is a must and a life long ambition. It is believed that a three days and nights sojourn to Puri will free a pilgrim from future births and deaths. Most of the time it is crowded with pilgrims, but on the occasion of Ratha Yatra, Puri becomes a ocean of seeting humanity. On this auspicious day Lord Jagannath is taken out in a huge procession and on an onormous chariot, 45 feet high, 35 feet square, and supported on 16 wheels, 7 feet in diameter. The chariot is drawn by thousands of devotees who view with one another to have this hon ur.

The other two chariots are those of Balbhadra and Subhadra, brother and sister of Sri Krishna. Balbhadra's chariot is 44 feet high and has 14 wheels, while that of Subhadra is 43 feet high and has 12 wheels. The event commemorates Krishna's journey to Mathura from Gokul at Kansa's invitation. The chariot procession goes along the broad avenue to Gundicha Mandir, the Lord's Summer Garden House, where they stay for seven days and then are brought

back to the temple. At the termination of the ceremony the chariots are broken up and used to manufacture religious relics. Every year new chariots are made. The deities themselves are made of wood and renewed at certain intervals when certain astronomical conditions are there. The wood selected for this purpose must also satisfy certain conditions. During the past one and half centuries the images were remade in 1863, 1893, 1931, 1950, 1969 and 1977. An outstanding feature of the temple is that there is no cast distinction and all are equal whether one happens to be a brahmin or a chandal or shudra.

The other festival celebrated here with great fervour is the bathing festival or Snan Yatra in Jysishtha, already mentioned. But Ratha Yatra is the most fantastic and captivating annual event. The legend of the origin of Lord Jagannath is equally fantastic. Krishna was killed by a hunter named Jara in ignorance, and Krishna's body was left to rot under a tree, but some pious persons found his bones and placed them in a box Later Vishnu directed a devout king Indradyumna in a dream to make an image of Jagannath and to place the bones of Krishan inside it. Vishwakarma, the architect of the gods was assigned the job of making the image. He agreed on the condition that he should be left undisturbed till the work was complete. A fortnight passed and the king grew impatient and entered the place, which made Vishwakarma angry, and he left the images unfinished That is why the deities have neither hands nor feet. Indradyumna prayed to Brahma, who promised to make the image famous. Brahma gave the images eyes and souls and also acted as the high priest at consecration.

The king of Puri, the descendant of king Anantavarman Chodaganga, the original founder of the temple, alone has the right to carry the Lord's umbrella and other paraphernalia, and it is he who sweepss the path before the chariots. Over 6,000 male adults are in the Lord's service, headed by the kind Some 20,000 people are said in all to be dependent on the temple for their livelihood. The Jagannath temple is a kind of world in itself. The festival is observed almost everywhere in the country where there is a temple dedicated to Jagannath.

**Teej**

Teej, purely a festival of girls and ladies is sacred to the goddess Parvati, the consort of Lord Shiva. It was on this auspicious day that Parvati was reunited with Shiva after a long separation. She declared this day sacred and auspicious and said whosoever invoked her would possess whatever they desired.

It is annually celebrated in most parts of India, and especially in the state of Rajasthan, on the third day of Ashadha. Gay processions bearing images of Parvati are taken out escorted by caparisoned elephants, camels and horses, as the bride Parvati leaves her parent's home for her husband. fefore taking out procession the goddess is ceremonially worshipped and prayed.

Swings are hung on the trees and in the houses, where the maidens and women amuse themelves by swinging. They wear gay apparels in red, green and gold, and paint their hands and feet in delicate designs with henna, and sing gay songs in praise of the goddess and the monsoon. Thus, it also welcomes the monsoon. Fairs are held on this occasion and people enjoy themselves to their full.

**Hari-Shayani Ekadashi**

Every Ekadashi is a special for exercise in piety and devotion. It is observed both in the dark and bright fortnights (Krishna and Shukla Pakshas) of every month. But some Ekadashi are considered relatively more merit-giving. Harishayani Ekadashi is another such. It means the day when Lord Hari or Vishnu retires to sleep on the bed of Sheshanag, in the Kshirsagar. According to a popular religious belief Hari slumbers during the four months of the rainy season. It begins on the 11th day of the bright forthnight of Ashadha (June-July), and terminates on the 11th tithi of the bright fortnight of Kartika (October-November). Therefore, both these Ekadashis are considered especially sacred and Vishnu is worshipped on both these Ekadashis.

This period of four months of the rainy season is known as Chaturmas" and during this period such auspicious activities as marriage, thread ceremony, etc., are prodhibited. During this period of four months, the sages, rishis, munis, etc., live at one place and

meditate ther only.

### Guru Vyasa Purnima

The full moon day of Ashadha is well-known all over the country as "Guru Vyas or Ashadha Purnima". This festival dates back to times immemorial. This auspicious day is set apart for the veneration and worship of the Guru. In ancient days the students or brahmcharis used to get their eduction in Ashramas and Gurukuls. The students would worship their teachers on this day and pay them their Gurudakshina or fee and presents according to their means and capacity. The devotees and disciples fast on this day and worship their gurus for seeking their blessings.

It is also known as Vyasa Purnima, because Righi Vyasa himself was a great Gurua. Vyasa or Veda-Vyasa, the son of Rishi Parashar and Satyavati, is also known as Krishna Dwaipayna, because he was dark complexioned and was born on an island or dwipa. He is said to have compiled the four Vedas, the Mahabharata and the eighteen Puranas.

This day may remind you the story of Eklavya, the matchless Nishada archer youth, who had given his right hand thumb in dakshina to his relentless guru and teacher Drongcharya. He gave it too gladly. Eklavya is one of the greatest examples of devotion to the teacher, and it is right that he is remembered on this day.

### Fasts and Festivals in Hemanta : Margashirsha-Pausha

Hemanta ushers in the winter season, comprising Margashirsha or Agrahayana and Pausha Bhagwan Sri Krishna in the Gita has said, "Among the months, I am Margashirsha". Gradully it grows colder and then extremely cold in the far north of the country, but in the south it is refreshningly cool, pleasing and never really so cold.

Winter is the season of youth, struggle, vigour and aspirations. The Vedic Man therefore prayed to God, "May I attain the span of hundred winters". Kalidas has painted the season of Hemanta thus:

The bloom of tenderer flowers is past

    And lilies droop forlorn

For winter-time is come at last
Rich with its ripened corn
Yet for the wealth of blossoms lost
Some hardier flowers appear
That bid defiance to the frost
Of sterner days, my dear.

The vines, remembering summer, shiver
In frosty winds, and gain
A fuller life from mere endeavour
To live through all that pain
Yet in the struggle and acquest
They turn as pale and wan
As lonely women who have missed
Known love now lost and gone.

Then may these winter days show forth
To you each known delight
Bring all that women count as worth
Pure happiness and bright
While villages with bustling cry
Bring home the ripened corn
And herons wheel through wintry sky
Forget and thoughts forlorn

The forbidding winter confines the people within doors, and there is not much scope for festivity and refoicing. Therefore, there are festivals few and far between.

**Bhairava Shatami**

The eighth lunar day of the dark half of Margashirsha is known as Bhairava Ashtami. Bhairava is Shiva's ganor, or his inferior form of manifestation. Bhairava is of terrible character and is worshipped to obtain success, prosperity, removal of obstacles and recovery from illness. As a terrible aspect of Shiva, he punishes the sinners, and for this purpose carries a danda, or a staff, or a rod. Therefore, he is also called Dandapani. He rides a dog, therefore, he is called Swaswa "whose horse is dog".

On Bhairava Ashtami, people having performed their early

morning ablutions, worship Bhairava and his mount, the dog with sweets, flowers, etc. The dogs are fed with milk, sweets and such other delicacies. At night the aspirants keep vigil and spend the time in telling stories relating to Bhairavanath. Dead ancestors are also offered oblations and libations in the morning after bath, and then kal-Bhairava is worshipped.

A myth says that once a controversy arose among the Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva that who was the greatest of them. Every deity pleaded his case, and ultimately the controversy took such an ugly turn that they started talking ill of one another. A chance remark of Brahma so enraged Shiva that he at once produced Bhairava, and ordered him to cut off one of the vive heads of Brahma. Bhairava at once did what he was told. Poor Brahma instantly became four-headed, and even now he remains so. It terrified all other gods and they propitiated Shiva and gana Bhairava.

**Vaikuntha Ekadashi**

Vakuntha Ekadashi is celebrated in the South, in the month of Margashirsha on both the eleventh days of bright and dark fortnights with solemnity. Devotees observe fast and keep night vigil the whole night and do kirtan, japa and have meditation sessions. A gateway in the temple is thrown open on this day and aspirants pass throught it, and this signifies the entrance into heaven or vaikuntha. Like any other Ekadashi, rice eating is prohibited on this day, because a demon is said to dwell in rice grains on this day. A demon was born out of the sweat that fell down from Brahma's head, and he wanted a place to live in from Brahma. Brahma then told him to go and live in rice grains eaten by people on Ekadashi and to become worns in their stomach.

Once, a great demon called Mura who had 7,000 sons, harassed the gods. The gods prayed Vishnu for protection against Mura Vishnu sent his Yog Maya to kill the demon and his sons, and she did it successfully. Thereupon, Vishnu said that the she would be known by the name of Ekadashi, and the people who observe fast and piety on this day would be freed from all sins and get a place in heaven.

There is another interesting story about the significance of Vaikuntha Ekadashi. Ambrisha, the king of Ayodhya was a great devoted of Vishnu and always observed Ekadashi vow. Once on Vaikuntha Ekadashi he fasted for three days and was about to break his fast, when Righi Duravasha appeared at his gate. The king received the Rishi with due regards and requested him to have meals. Durvasha readily agreed and went to perform his ablutions.

The king waited and waited but the Rishi did not turn up and the auspicious moment of breaking the fast was approaching if he did not break his fast before the day ended, his vow would not bear any results, but if he ate anything that would be a disregard to the sage. King Ambrisha was in a sort of dilemma. As a solution he took a sip of water.

When Durvasha returned, he knew exactly what had happened, and grew angry. In his anger he tore a hair from his head and charged it to destroy the king. Then, at once, the discus of Vishnu appeared and destroyed the power of the hair and chased the Rishi to kill him. Durvasha ran to Brahma and Shiva for protection against the discus, but it proved of no avail. Then, he sought refuge with Vishnu himself, but Vishnu said that he was dependent on his devotees. He ordered him to go and beg pardon of Ambrisha. He did accordingly and only then he could be saved.

**Gita Jayanti**

The Bhagvad Gita Jayanti is celebrated on the eleventh day of the bright half of Margashirsha (November, December). It is believed that on this day Lord Krishna taught Arjuna the sacred lore of Gita on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, and thus made available to the whole of humon race the Song Celestial. It forms a part of the famous epic Mahabharata.

At the beginning of the great war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, Arjuna, touched with pity for the possible slaughter and bloodshed of friends and relations, appealed to Krishna for guidance. Krishna had refused to take up arms on either side but accepted to become Arjuna's charioteer. Krishna urged Arjuna to follow his dharma or duty as a soldier and a Kshatriya, forgetting

all other considerations. It immediately dispelled all his doubts and gloom, and he engaged himself whole-heartedly in the performance of his dharma.

The Gita makes it crystal clear in no uncertain terms that the path of salvation lies in action performed without desiring its fruits, which should be dedicated at God's lotus feet. This is real nishkam karmayoga, which leads to attainment of true happiness, peace of mind and freedom from passions. By devoted actions, without attachment to their results, one gets ones desires uprooted, and finally attains perfect serentity of soul and quiescence in the Supreme Soul at the time of death.

The Gita has been a great and an inexhaustible source of strength, inspiration and wisdom throught all these centuries. The Gita, as a voice of the Supreme, is not merely a scripture, but a great song of universal wisdom and spirtual upliftment. It is to be always studied and pondered upon, for it illumines a path leading to perfection and purity, which can be followed even while doing one's wordly duties. It urges all and sundry to perform actions remaining united with God at heart.

On the Gita Jayanti day, the Gita is read, recited and discources are held on its various philosophical aspects People fast and worship Krishna and the Gita, and resolve to study and imbibe the spirit of Gita with far greater efforts. As a matter of fact, a pocket edition of the Gita must always be kept, and its selected verses repreated whenever there is such an opportunity, because the more we study it, the more enlightened we are.

**Dattatreya Jayanti**

It is celebrated on the full moon day of Margashirsha (November-December) all over the country, and specially in Maharashtra. Dattatreya is the son of Rishi Atri and Anusuya. Aunsuya, the jewel among the devoted and virtuous wives did severe a penance to beget a son equal in merits to Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesha, the Hindu, Trimurti. Her so severe a penance aroused the jealousy of Lakshmi, Saraswati and Parvati, and so they sent their husbands Vishnu, Brahma and Shivá to test her virtue, by asking her to give

them alms while nude.

They approached Anusuya in the guise of three mendicants and asked her to give alms with an uncovered body. She was on the horns of dilemma for a while, but then she reciting a mantra sprinkled a little water over the three sanyasis and they were instantantly transformed into three babes, and her breasts at once swelled with milk. She took up the three babies and suckled them in a nude state. In the meantime Atri returned from his morning ablutions and was told about what had transpired during his absence. He already knew it through his divine vision. He fondly embraced the three children and they turned into one with three heads and six hands.

Lakshmi, Saraswati and Parvati got worried when their husbands did not return even after a lapse of long time. They hurried to Anusuya and asked her to give them their husbands back in alms. They also begged her forgivenesss. Anusuya acceded to their request and the Trimurti of Vishnu, Brahma and Shiva appeared immediately in their real forms. They blessed the Rishi couple and the child Dattatreya.

Thus Dattatreya came to possess three heads and six hands. In him portion of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, or more particularly Vishnu, was incarnated. And so he is worshipped as a Triad. He had three sons, Soma, Datta and Durvasa, to whom also a portion of the divine essence was transmitted. He was the patron deity of Karta-viya and gave him thousand arms. Dattatreya learned from 24 objects which included the earth, water, fire, sky, moon, sun, pigeon, python, ocean, moth, honey-bee, elephant, deer fish, etc, and treated them as his preceptors and gurus.

On Dattatreya Jayanti people get up early in the morning and have ablutions in sacred streams. etc., observe fast and spend the day in meditiation, prayer and worship. They meditate on the life of Dattatreya and read his works which include Avadhuta Gita and Jivanmukta Gita. The image of Dattatreya is worshipped with flowers, lamps, incense, camphor, etc. and the aspirants take resolve to follow in the footsteps of Swami Dattatreya.

**Vaitarani Vrata**

It is observed on the eleventh day of the dark half of Margashirsha (November-December). The aspirants observe fast and other rituals prescribed for such a day. In the evening a black cow is worshipped. She is bathed in fragrant water, and sandal paste, etc., is applied on its horns and then naivedya is offered. Brahmins are also given gifts of food, railment and a cow made of either gold or silver.

The river Vaitarani, the Hindu Styx, is to be crossed by the departed souls before the internal regions can be entered. The river is said to be filled with all kinds of filth, blood ordour, etc. It runs with great impetuosity and can be crossed only with the help of a cow. That is why a cow is worshipped and offered naivedya on this day. A cow given to Brahmins transports a dead man over that river Therefore, cows are given in charity to Brahmins at the time of one's death.

**Rukmani Ashtami**

This fast is observed by women, both married and unmarried on the eighth day of the dark half of Pausha (December-January). It is believed that Rukmani was born on this tithi. Rukmani was Lord Krishna's principal wife and queen. She bore him a son, Pradyumna. According to Harivansha Purana she was sought in marriage by Krishna, with whom she fell in love. But her brother Rukmin had bethroted her to Shishupala, king of Chedi. On her wedding day, as she was going to the temple, Krishna saw her, took her by the hand, and carried her away in his chariot. They were pursued by Shishupal and Rukmin, but Krishna defeated them both and took her safe to Dwarka, where he married her.

Rukmani along with Krishan and Pradyumna is worshipped on this day, strict fast is observed and married and unwidowed women are feasted and gifts given. A priest is also fed and given dan- dakshina on this day. It pleases Rukmani, and then it is easy to please Krishna. The observance of this fast ensures conjugal happiness and prosperity, and desired men as husbands to the unmarried girls.

**Swarupa Dwadashi**

The vow of Swarupa Dwadashi is observed on the twelfth day of dark half of Pausha (December-January). It is observed by women desiring physical beauty, happiness and good progeny. They observe it with great enthusiasm, cheer, self control and restraint of senses.

On the preceding day, i.e., on Ekadashi, aspirant women ritually tell and listen to the stories relating to Lord Vishnu. On Dwadashi they keep strict fast and place an image of Vishnu in a vessel full of sesame (til), and worship it ritually. After that havana (sacrifice) is performed in the fire prepared from the dried cow-dung, taken before it fell on the ground. One hundred and eight oblations are offered in the fire thus made, and Brahmins are fed and given gifts in charity, then the women break their fast.

A story about this fast goes: Once Parvati asked her consort Lord Shiva, if there was any such fast or vow by observing which an ugly woman may turn into beautiful one. Ugliness is a curse and a woman not having good looks, is always at a great disadvantage, though she may possess many virtues. Shiva appreciated Parvati's concern about women not possessing good looks, and then told her that in such a situation the observance of a strict fast of Swarupa Dwadashi was the only remedy. Parvati thanked Shiva, and since then this fast is being observed by the women. Both pretty and not so pretty or ugly women observe it. One to maintain beauty and the other to obtain it.

**Fasts and Festivals In. Sharad: Ashvina-Kartika**

Seasons and their accompanying festivals weave a complex, but wonderful cultural pattern. They are gay and happy occasions, and enthuse the life with a new spirit of joy and hope. Sharad, the Autumn is one of the most beautiful season, corresponding to september-November. With the coming of sweet autumn-faced Sharad, the Rains slowly make their exit, and a charming season is ushered in. It is characterized by its azure clear skies, brimful sparkling lakes and rivers. It has been sung and glorified down all these ages. Ashvina and Kartika are two of the most auspicious

months of the Hindu calendar. This is also a season of great festivity and rejolcing. In the words of Kalidas:

The autumn comes, a maiden fair
In slenderness and grace,
With nodding rice-stems in her hair
And lilies in her face.

In flowers sof grasses she is clad
And as she moves along,
Birds greet her with cooing glad
Like bracelets, tinkling song.

A diadem adorns the night
Of multitudinous stars,
Her silken robe is white moonlight
Set free from cloudy bars.

And on her face (the radiant moon)
Bewitching smiles are shown,
She seems a selender maid, who soon
Will be woman grown.

Over the rice-fields, laden plants
Are shivering to the breeze,
While in his brisk caresses dance
The blossom-burdened trees.

He ruffles every lily-pond
Where blossoms kiss and part,
And stirs with lover's fancies fond
The young man's eager heart.

Some of the important festivals and fasts which occur during Sharad, are Pitra Paksha, Dussehra, Navratra, Deepavali, Kartika Snan, Karwa Chauth and Guru Parab.

**Kojagara**

This festival is observed on the night of full moon in the month of Ashvina (September-October). The word "Kojagra" is a combination of two terms, Kah + jagara, which means "who is awake?". It is an exclamation of goddess Lakshmi, who descends

on the earth on this auspicious night and blesses with wealth and prosperity all those who are awake. Hence, the night is spent in festivity and various games of amusement, in honour of the goddess.

It is a harvest festival and is celebrated throughout the country. Lakshmi is worshipped and night vifil is observed. According to a folk-tale, once a king fell on evil days, and was in great financial straits, but then his queen observed this fast and night vigil, and worhispped the goddess of wealth, Lkshmi. Consequently, they were blessed by the goddess and they regained their prosperity.

**Valmiki Jayanti**

The birthday of the Ai Kavi (the First Poet), Valmiki is celebrated on the full moon day of Ashvina (September-October). Valmiki is the author of the so-celebrated Ramayana in Sanskrit. He was contemporary of Rama, the hero of the Ramayana. Valmiki himself is represented as taking part in some of the scenes he relates. He received the banished Sita into his hermitage and educated her twin sons Kusha and Lava. The invention of the "Shloka" (epic metre) is attributed to Valmiki.

Originally, Valmiki belonged to a depressed class and was a sort of robber. He robbed and even killed the people passing through the forest, but because of the influence of some sages, he repented and betook himself to a hermitage on a hill in the district of Bonda in Bundelkhanda. There, he is said to have eventually reveived Sita, when banished by Rama.

He got his name "Valmiki" because when immersed in meditation, he allowed himself to be everrun with ants like an anthill. His original name was Ratnakar. Many depressed classes in the country trace their lineage to Valmiki. On his birthday he is worshipped and prayed and his portraits are taken out in gay processions through the main bazaars and streets. Kirtans are also held in Valmiki temples.

**Pitra Paksha**

The dark half of the Ashvina (September-October) if observed as

Pitra Paksha throughout the Hindu world, and sacrifices called Shraddha is offered to the dead and departed ancestors of the family. On each day of the fortnight, oblations of water and Pindas or balls of rice and meal are offered to the dead relatives by the surviving relatives. A Shraddha is not a funeral ceremony but a supplement to such a ceremony. It is an act of reverential homage to dead person performed by relative, and is supposed to supply the dead with strengthening nutriment after the performance of the previous funeral ceremonies has endowed the ethereal bodies. It is believed that until Shraddha has been performed the deceased relative is a preta or a restless, wandering ghost and has no real body. Only after the Shraddha, he attains a position among the Petris or Divine Fathers in their blissful abode called Pitri-loka. A Shraddha is most desirable and efficacious when done by a son.

The eldest son or some other elder male member of the family pertorms Shraddha in honour of the deads and offers oblations. Part of the food-offerings is also given to the cows and the crows. Brahmins are fed and given dan-dakshina, for it is believed that whatever is given to the Brahmins also reaches the departed souls. Khir, a sweet milk and rice preparation, is especially prepared and offered to the Pitris on this occasion. On the last day of the fortnight, i.e., Amavasya oblations are offered to all those dead ancestors whose tithi of death is not known. In Brahma Purana the significance of this ceremony is described. During Pitra Paksha shaving of the beard, cutting of the hair, wearing of new clothes, pairing of the nails are not allowed.

**Dussehra**

Dussehra or Vijay Dashmi is a very popular Hindu festival, celebrated with eclat throughout the country. It is observed on the tenth day of the bright half of Ashvina (September-October).

It is a ten-day celebration, during which Ramalila which is based on the epic story of the Ramayana, is staged at various places in most of the cities and towns in northern India with elaborate rituals. During its performance the Ramayana is constantly recited accompanied by music. It presents a fire blending of music, dance, mime and poetry before an enthusiastic and religious audience

sharing every event of the story with the actors.

Struggle between the forces of good and evil, and the eventual victory of the former over the later, is basic to the Ramayana theme. Rama symbolizes the best in humanity, and Ravana the evil forces. Dussehra in Sanskrit also means taking away the ten sins. The ten heads of Ravana, represents these ten sins and Rama destroys them. Ravana abducted Sita with the help of another demon named Maricha. Ravana kept Sita in the Ashoka Grove and persisted in making Sita his wife, but Sita always thought of her husband Rama.Rama sent his messengers to Ravana and urged him to return Sita, but the evil-minded Ravana refused to do so. Rama set off for Lanka with Sugriva, Hanuman, Angada, Jambvan and hundreds of other mighty monkeys. Ravana's younger brother Vibhishana, a noble soul and devotee of God, however, took refuge with Rama. Rama built a causeway in the sea to carry him and his forces across the water.

Rama, along with his young brother Lakshmana, killed all the demons and their king Ravana and regained Sita, Finally they returned to Ayodhya in the vimana Pushpaka.

On this occasion huge effigies stuffed with brilliant fireworkds are raised at various open grounds and set fire to be Rama. The effigies belong to Ravana, his brother Kumbhakarna and son Meghnatha. This marks the culmination and termination of the celebrations. Elaborate and gay processions depicting various scenes of the Ramayana in the form of tableaus, ae taken out through bazaars and main streets. Apart from all this, Ramlila is also performed as a dance-drama by professional troupes.

Dussehra festival held at Mysore, is one of India's most colourful phenomena.The spectacular procession taken out on this day is a veritable extravaganza. The colourful Dussehra fair and festival of Kulu is also very famous. Among the Ramalilas, the one staged at Varanasi under the patronage of the local Raja, deserves mention. On this auspicious day Lord Rama is worshipped, prayed and meditated upon to obtain his blessings and favour In old days the kings generally marched their forces on this day against their enemies the day when Rama routed Ravana.

**Navratra/durga Puja**

Navratras are observed twice a year, once in Chaitra, preceding Rama Navami, and then in Ashvin (September-October) preceding Dussehra. This nine-day Navratra commences with the new moon of Ashving and terminates with Mahanavami, on the ninth lunar day of the bright half of the month. During these nine days, devotees keep strict fast and Durga is worshipped. The style of observing Navratra in different parts of the country may be different, but its sole aim is to propitiate Mother Durga and to seek her blessings.

On Pratipada (first lunar day of bright half of Ashvin), an earthen pitcher filled with water and its mouth covered with green leaves and an earthen lid, is installed with invocation of Ganesha, the god of learning and wisdom, and then Durga is invoked and ritually worshipped with durva grass, flowers, leaves, lamps, incense, new grains, raiments, etc. Barley are also sprouted and grown in a pot on this occasion, and the same are worn in caps and on ears on the final day. Unmarried girls below the age of ten are also worshipped and given gifts during these nine days. The aspirants sleep on the ground and keep strict fast all these days. A clarified butter lamp is always kept burning before the installed pitcher during the celebration, and daily Durga-saptashti, Devi Bhagvat Purana and Devi Mahatmya section of the Markandeya Purana are read and recited.

In bengal, Durga Puja is celebrated with great excitement and festivity and huge puja pavilions, with ten-armed Durga, are set up. Durga, the beautiful, but fierce gooddess rides her mount of the lion, killing the demon Mahishasura. In each of her ten hands she holds one of the gods special weapons. Vishnu's discus, Shiva's trident, Varuna's conch shell, Agni's flaming dart, Vayu's bow, Surya's quiver, Indra's thunderbolt, Kuber's club, a garland of snakes from Shesha, and as a charger a lion from the Himalayas. A fierce battle raged between Durga and Mahishasura, but finally she killed him with a spear.

Durga puja surpasses all other festivals in Bengal in its popularity and mass appeal. During the celebrations music, dance, drama and

poety are performed before the enthralled audiences. The earthen images of goddess Durga are taken on the final day in triumphal processions from all corners of coverage on the river where they are ceremonially immersed. Durga Puja is more than a ritual as it invests the lives of every one, and produces a fevrish literary and artistic activity. Durga is supposed to visit her parents Himavan and mother Mena during these days only in the year. The final day marks the end of this brief visit when she leaves for Mount Kailash, the abode of her lord and husband Shiva. Bengali ladies give an emotion-charged and affectionate send off to Durga, and the ceremony is charactetrized with a daughter's departure to her husband's house.

**Sharad Purnima**

Sharad Purnima is observed on the night of full moon of Ashvina. The Moon-god is also the lord of herbs, seeds, the Brahmins, waters and Nakshatras or Constellations. It is believed that on Sharad Purnima, Amrit or elixir is being showered on the earth by the Moon through his beams.

On this auspicious day Kshir or Khir (milk thickend with rice and mixed with sugar, candy, etc.) is especially prepared in the temples and homes, and offered to Hari amidst ringing of the bells and chanting of the hymns then it is given in the morning as prasad to the davotees. The recipe is kept in the moonshine all the night so that it may absorb the amrit falling from the moon. Such khir is considered to posses many qualities At night Moon-god is also worshipped and offered naivedya.

**Deepawali**

Deepawali or the Festival of Lights is an important and popular festival celebrated throughout the country in one form or the other. It falls on the last day of the dark half of Kartika (October-November). As a matter of fact it is a five-day long festival, but the main celebrations are on Deepawali.

Dewali is associated with several legends. One myth says that on this auspicious day Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and good fortune rooams about and visits the houses of people. Therefore,

people tidy up their homes, establishments and shops and decorate them lavishly to welcome the goddess. In the night she is worshipped with great devotion. It also commemorates the triumph of Lord Rama over Ravana, and Rama's return to Ayodhya. It is also on this day that Krishna killed the demon Narkasura.

A few days before the festival, the houses are white washed and completely cleaned. The courtyards, the gates and the place of worship are decorated with bandanvars, flowers intricate coloured paperwork and at night every nook and corner of the house, etc., is illuminated with earthen lamps, candles, and fireworks are displayed. People get up early in the morning and have bath and then move about freely in an atmosphere of gaiety, mirth, rejoicing and festivity. Lots of sweets are prapared and exchanged.

On this occasion people ask for each other's forgiveness for the wrongs done knowingly or unknowingly and mutual relations are reestablished and strengthened. Thus, all enmity is for given and forgotten and people embrace one another. At night Lakshmi, alsong with Ganesha is worshipped, old accounts are closed and new ones are opened. People in throngs go about the bazaars and streets during the night and appreciate the finest illumination. Special shops and bazaars are also set up on this occasion, and there is a brisk buying of sweets, utensils, clothes, jewellery, toys, etc.

Diwali also marks the advent of new season and the sowing of new crops. On this day begins the new Vikrama Era and new account books are opened. The famous king Vikramaditya, after whose name the era is, was crowned on this day. People greet each other and distribute sweets. In Bengal Kali is worshipped with great fervour on this day. The Jains celebrate Deepawali as a day of final liberation and moksha of Lord Mahavira. Similarily Swami Dayananda Sarswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, attained salvation on this day.The great Swami Rama Tirtha also entered his final jal-samadhi on this tithi. At great Jaina shrines like that of Pavapuri in Bihar, and Girnar in Gujarat, special puja festivals are held, sacred scriptures read and recited and Lord Mahavira

worshipped. Thus this great festival of lights symbolizes man's urge to move towards light of truth from darkness of ignorance and unhappiness.

**Dhan Teras**

Two days prior Deepawali on the 13th day of the dark half of Kartika, Dhan Teras or Dhanvantri Trayodashi is observed with great mirth and gaiety. Dhanvantri, the physician of gods who appeared at the churning of the ocean is worshipped on this day, specially by the physician-community. He is the father of Indian science of medicine and Ayurveda is attributed to his. He is also called Sudha pani, because he appeared from the ocean, carrying nectar in his hands.

The people get early at dawn and baths, put on new robea and keep fast. In the evening an earthen-lamp is invariable lit before the door of every house, and then fast is broken. New utensils are bought on this day because it is regarded very auspicious.

**Narak Chaturdashi**

The next day to Dhan Teras, is celebrated Narak Chaturdashi. This day is dedicated to Yama, the god of Naraka or Hell. The early morning bath at dawn on this day is considered of great religious merit. It is believed that those who bathe on this tithi after the sunrise, get their religious merit destroyed. Therefore, people get up early in the morning and first of all have their ablutions, etc. Before bathing, oil is rubbed in the body, which is greatly invigorating and purifying .

After the bath, Yamraj is offered libations thrice to please and appease him, so that he may spare the person the tortures of death. On this day even those persons whose persons are alive, offer these libations, otherwise they are not allowed to do so. Fast is observed and in the evening lamps are offered to Yama. It is believed that piety observed on this day in the honour of Lord Yama, liberates a man from possible futuree tortures of the hell.

**Govardhan Puja**

Govarhan Puja is celebrated on Pratipada,i.e., the first day of the

bright fortnight of Kartika (October-November), the day following Deepawali. Annakut is also observed on the same day. This day is associated with an interesting event of Krishna's life. On this day Krishna lifted the Goverdhan Mountain (in Vrindavana) on his little finger for seven days and protected the cows, and the people of Vrindavana against the deluge of rain sent by enraged Indra, the god of heavens and rains.

It so happened that one day Krishna saw the people of Vrindavana making great preparations for the worship of Indra. Krishna convince them of its futility and induced them to worship Mount Goverdhan, who provided shelter to them and nourishment to their cows. They accordingly parformed a great ceremony to honour the mountain and were amply rewarded by the manifestation of Krishna as the spirit of Govardhan. It enraged Indra, and he sent a terrible deluge to teach a lesson to Nanda and the cowherds. Krishna then raised the mountaion and protected them under it for seven days and nights. Ultimatly, Indra realized who Krishna really was. He came to Krishna in real humility and paid him homage. Even today, people in thousands from all over India visit, worship and circumambulate Mount Govardhan on this day. Those who cannot come to Vrindavana, worship it at their respective homes with devotion and give gifts tc Brahmins Cows and bulls are also decorated and worshipped on this day.

**Bhaiya Duj**

Bhaiya Duj, symbolising the deep affection between brothers and sisters, is celebrated on the second day of the bright fortnight of Kartika, which falls the next day to Govardhan Puja. The married women invite their dear brothers to their respective homes, apply turmeric or sandal paste tilaks on their foreheads, tie a coloured thread round their right wrists, pray for their prosperity and longevity and then feast them on sweets and other delicacies. In return they receive valuable gifts. Unmarried girls do so their parents' homes.

Bhaiya Duj is also called the Yama Dvitiya, because this day also symbolizes the deep affection between Yama and his sister Yami. Sisters pray Yama for their brothers' longevity, good health and

happiness, and observe strict fast. The Sunborn Yamuna, sister to Yama, is also worshipped on this day.

**Kartika Snan**

Among the twelve months of the year, some are regarded specially holy and sacred, and as such they are most suitable for the acts of piety. These are Vaisakha, Kartika and Magha.

All though the month kof Kartika, the early morning bath in some sacred river, stream, pond or at a well is considered highly meritorious. On the sacred rivers like Ganga, Yamuna, etc., a month long bathing festival is held. Some people specially set up their tents on their banks for this purpose, and at the termination of month long bathing festival they return to their distant homes. During the month the aspirants observe strict continence, have regular morning bath in the sacered streams, take a single simple meal every day and spend their time in prayer, meditation and such other acts of piety and devotion.

Women-folk in villages and towns get up quite early in the morning, and go to the sacred streams in groups, singing hymns, an after ablutions visit the nearby temples. They observe fast and hang lamps in the sky in small baskets from the bamboo tops at their houses or on the river banks. These sky lamps are kept burning all through Kartika to light the path of deeparted souls across the sky. Tulsi is also worshipped in the evening, and an earthen lamp is placed near it.

**Tulsi Vivahotsva**

Tulsi plant is sacred and cultivated specially in homes and temples. It is considered wife of Vishnu an shown respect accordingly. It is offered daily puja by the women in the evening with lamps. Tulsi leaf is put in the mouth of a dying person along with Gangajal and this fecilitates easy departure. Watering, cultivating and worship of Tulsi plant ensures happiness. When its leaves are put into any water it becomes as good as Gangajal. Tulsi leaves offered to Vishnu in Kartika (November) pleases him more than the gift of a thousand cows.

Tulsi is generally grown on a small square pillar, hollow at the top, with its four sides facing the four cardinal directions. Since Tulsi is Vishnupriya (beloved of Vishnu), their marriae is celebrated in Kartika Shukla Ekadashi, i.e., the eleventh day of the bright half of Kartika (October-November). In Padma Purana we find the details of the ceremony. On this day she married to Vishnu. The image of Vishnu is richly decorated and then carried to the place where Tulsi plant is grown, and there the marriage is ritually solemnized. Fast is observed on this day.

**Surya Shashti**

On the sixth day of the bright fortnight of Kartika (October-November) this fast is observed, mainly by women having husbands and children. The fast is observed continuously for three days. On the preceding day only one meal is taken and that too without salt. On next day, i.e., on Shashti women on fast do not take even water; and worship the sun with naivedya and water and keep night vigil.

The next day on Saptami, the aspirant women go to bathing ghats early before sunrise, and then having bathed, worship the rising sun and then only they break their fast. The Brahmins are also fed and given gifts on this day. The fast and piety observed on this day ensure good health, longevity, and happiness of their progeny and husbands.

**Skanda Shashti**

Skanda Shashti is celebrated in South India with great religious fervour and devotion in the Tamil month of Tulam (October-November). Skanda, the second son of Shiva, is also known as Kartikeya and Subramanya. He was produced without the intervention of a female. Shiva cast his seed into fire, and it was afterwards received by the Ganges. He was fostered by Krittika (Pleiades) and hence he has six heads and the name Kartikeya. He was born for the purpose of destroying Taraka, a demon whose austerities had made him formidable to gods.

Swami Kartikeya is represented riding a peacock. holding a bow in one hand and an arrow in the other. His wife is Dev Sena or

Kumari. He has many titles; as a warrior he is Mahasena; Senapati; Siddha-sena, "leader of the Siddhas", and Yuddha- ranga; also Kumara, the boy; Guha, "the mysterious one"; Shakti-dhara' spear-holder"; and in the south he is called subramanya. He is also called Tarakajit, Dwadashahara (twelve handed) and Dwadaksha (twelve-eyed).

In south India there are six places which are associated with his life and work and regarded most holy. At all these places Skanda Shashti is celebrated with great fervour and thousands of devotees congregate at each temple to seek the Lord's blessings. It is the day when Taraka was defeated. Bhajans are sung, kirtans chanted, people fed and scenes from his life dramatized on the occasion. The festivity begins six days preceding the Shashti. Lord Subramanya is worshipped during these days and devotees make pillgrimages to different Subramaniya shrines. The pieties and devotion observed on this day ensure success, prosperity, peace and happiness. In the Gita Bhagvan Sri Krishna has said: "Among the generals of armies, I am Kartikeya".

**Karwa Chauth**

Karwa Chauth is observed by married ladies on the fourth daya of the dark half of Kartika (October-November) in order to ensure prosperity, sound health and longevity of their husbands. Widows and unmarried girls do not practice it. The married women keep a strict fast and do not take even a drop of water. They get up early in the morning, perform their ablutions, etc, and wear new and festive raiments.

Shiva, Parvati and their son Kartikeya are worshipped on this day alongwith ten Karwas (the small earthen pots with spouts) filled with sweets. The Karwas are given to the daughters and sisters along with gifts. At night when the moon appears, the women break their fast after offering water to the moon. The story of Karwa Chauth is told and heard among the women. Sometimes a Brahmin priest telis this story and gets gifts in return. The married women receive costly gifts from their husbands, brothers and parents on this occasion. They touch the feet of their mother in-laws and other elderly ladies of the family and seek their blessings.

There are many interesting stories about this celebration. A legend says that once on this day a young married woman observed this fast at her parents house. She was very beautiful and tender. The austerity of the strict fast made her almost lifeless. So, her brothers caused to burn a fire on a nearby hill and showed her as the glow of the rising moon. No sooner did she break her fast on seeing the false moon, than she received the evil news of her husband's death at a disfant place. She immediately set out for her husband's house. On the way Shiva- Parvati met her and explained to her that the cause of her tragedy was the immature termination of the fast. Parvati gave her some blood from her little finger and asked the lady to sprinkle it on her dead husband. Parvati also advised her to observe complete and strict Karwa Chauth fast in future.

On reaching home, the lady sprinkled the holy blood over her husband's dead body and he was at once revived. Ever since then, she observed Karwa Chauth fast in strict conformity and lead a happy prosperous and healthy life with her husband and children.

**Devuthani Ekadashi**

Vishnu slumbers for four months from the eleventh day of the bright half of Ashadha (June-July) till the tenth day of the bright half of Kartika (October-November). And then, he gets up on the eleventh day, which is known as Devuthani Ekadashi. During these four months all other gods sleep and so auspicious ceremonies like marriage, thread ceremony, etc., are not observed.

On this day, ladies observe fast, worship Vishnu and sing hymns in praise of various gods and goddesses around a cowdung cake- fire. It also marks the beginning of eating new products of the fields for the time in the season. These include especially sugarcane and waternuts. It is obviously a rural festival, and is observed with much gaiety and festivity in the countryside. From this day onward marriages, etc., can be held as it marks again the beginning of auspicious time. It is believed that Vishun got tired in killing the great demon Shankahasura, and so he went sleep for a period of four months and with him also slumbered the other deities.

**Guru Parab**

The festivity of Guru Parab falls on the full moon day of Kartika-October (November) and is celebrated to commemorate Guru Nanak, the founder Guru of Sikhism. Guru Nanak was born in 1469 at Talwandi about 45 kms. away from Lahore and is now known as Nankanś Shib. At Nankana Sahib there is a beautiful Gurudwara, and a holy tank or sarovar. On Guru Parab, a grand fair and festival is held here, and Sikhs in thousands congregate here from India and abroad.

Nanak was a great reformer, preacher and a saint. In Sikhism he tried to harmonize both Hinduism and Islam. He never believed in caste-distinctions and liberalized social practices. He preached the name of God as a potent means of spiritual realization. His name and its repetition pelps us to develop the best in us. A true Sikh strives not for salvation or paradise but always loves to see God. Many of Nanak's hymns, which form part of the Guru Granth Sahib, reflect clearly how the sight of God and his love itself is supreme.

God is both nirgun and sagun. Before creation God lived absolutely in himself but then he became sagun and manifested himself and became what is called the name; and in order to realize Himself, He made nature, wherein He has His seat and is diffused everywhere and in all directions in the form of love.

Nanak travelled widely in India and abroad and this life and teachings have been a great source inspiration. He was follwed by nine other Gurus, in succession, under whom Sikhism gradually developed. On Guru Parab Guru Granth Sahib, the holy scripture, is continuously read and recited in the Gurudwaras, processions are taken out, free langars (meals) are arranged and prasad in distributed. The festival is observed with great enthusiasm all over India.

Similarly other Gurus are also commemorated on other Guruparabs. For example, the second Guru Parab commemoralting Guru Govind Singh is celebrated in the month of Pausha (December-Jaunary).

**Kartika Purnima**

Sikhs celebrate Kartika Purnima as Guru Parab and Nanak's birthday, but the Hindus celebrate it as a day when God incarnated himself as Matsya Avtar or in Fish-formation. The aim of Fish Incarnation was to save Vavaswata, the seventh Manu, and the progenitor of the human race from destruction by a deluge.

Charities done and piety observed on this day are believed to earn high religious merit. Bathing in the Gangas, or in other holy water is considered of special religious significance. People keep fast, practice charities and meditate on God.

It is also believed that Shankara killed demon Tripurasura on this day and so he is also called Tripurari. Shiva is worshipped on this occasion and giving away of the bull, the mount of Shiva, as a gift to a Brahmin, is thought to be of great religious significance. Big cattle fairs are also held on this day at various places. For example, a Cattle Fair held at the sacred Pushkar Lake, near Ajmer, is a great draw, which transforms the scene into a seething sea of colour and gaiety, tempared by the presence of the devout. Thousands of camels, cows, bulls, buffaloes, sheep, goats etc., are brought there fore sale. Camel races are held and there is a lot of fun and merry-making. Over a hundred thousand pilgrims take bath here on this day in the sacred lake.

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for sale. Camel races are held and there is a lot of fun and merry-making. Over a hundred thousand pilgrims take bath here on this day in the sacred lake.

**Fasts And Feitivals In Shishira : Magha-Phalguna**

Shishira, comprising Magha and Phalguna, and corresponding to English January-March months, is refeshing cool, pleasant and health giving. It marks the advent of early spring. Magha is one of the holiest Hindu months, and many important festivals including Vasant Panchami, Pongal, Makar Sankranti, Maghi Purnima,etc., fall during this period. Phalguna brings forth the important festivals of Shivaratri and Holi. The scenes of early Spring are thus painted in words by Kalidas:

Now dearest, lend a heedful ear
    And listen while I sing
Delights to evey maiden dear

    The charms of early spring
When earth is dotted with the heaps
    Of corn, when heron-scream
Is rare but sweet, when passion leaps
    And paints a livelier dream.

When all must cheerfully applaud
    A blazing open fire
Or if they need must go abroad
    The sun is their desire
When everybod hopes to find
    The frosty chill allayed
By garments warm, a window blind
    Shut, and a sweet young maid
Then may the days of early spring
    For you be rich and full
With love's proud, soft philandering
    And many a candy-pull
With sweetest rice and sugarcane
    And may you float above
The absent grieving and the pain

Of separated love.

**Mauni Amavasya**

The fifteenth day of the dark fortnight of Magha is well-known as Mauni Amavasya. Magha is one of the most sacred Hindu months. On this day complete silence is observed. If this tithi falls on Moday, then its auspiciousness increases all the more. This is also the day of a dip in the holy Ganga.

Like Kartika Bathing, Magha Bathing is also highly rewarding, and so, many aspirants live on the banks of Ganga throughout the month and daily enjoy bathing in the sacred river. The month long bathing and fasting end with the observance of Mauri Amavasya.

On Mauni Amavasya Lord Vishnu is worshipped and the peepal tree is circumambulated. In the Gita, Lord Krishna has said" Among the trees, I am Aswattha". Aswattha or peepal (Ficus Religiosa) is a holy tree.

The observance of piety and devotion on this day at Prayag, the prince of pilgrimage centres, where the Ganga, the Yamuna, and the Saraswati confluent, is highly meritorious Aspirants come and live here for a full month and practice prescribed rituals and ceremonial sacrifices, which is known as "Kalpa-vas". Through the whole month there are religious discourses, kirtan, bhajan and satsand. The aspirants take full advantage of all these. They take a simple one meal a day or eat only fruit and drink some milk. Brahmins and others deserving persons are given gifts, food, raiments, etc., in charity, Thus, they earn a lot of spiritual merit by practising religious ceremonies.

**Sakata Chauth**

This vow falls on the fourth day of the dark half of Magha (January-February). This tithi is regarded as the birthday of Lord Ganesha. On this day Vrata is observed in the honour of Ganesha, and it ensures wisdom, trouble free life and prosperity.

The fast is observed both by men and women. After early morning bath etc., a pitcher and Ganesh idol are installed and worshipped with sweets, and balls made of jaggery and sesame seeds (til).

Moon-god and Rohini are also worshipped ritually and offered naivedya.

At night with the rising of the moon, the fast is broken. The moon is worshipped and offered water (arghya).

A story in connection with the observance of this fast reads: Once there was a righteous and judicious king. His queen Ratnavali was wise, beautiful and virtuous. They led a very happy and contented life, but unfortunately one day their kingdom was attacked, and they both had to fell to the jungle for their life. Thus deprived of their kingdom and wealth, they were living a life of misery in the forest. One day they met Rishi. The Rishi was none else but Mahamuni Markandeya. They told him their state of woe, and how were they deprived of their kingdom.

All knowing Rishi Markandeya meditated for a while and told them that their tragedy was the result of sins accumulated in the previous birth. The king was a hunter in the previous birth and used to observe Sakata chaturathi Vrata, but later he stopped observing it. He became king in the present life because of the religious merits he earned by observing the vow, but now his punya has exhausted and sins are beaing fruit; and therefore all his troubles. Markandeya advised them to propitiate Ganesha to atone their past sins by observing the Sakata Chautha fast with full devotion. They did accordingly, and finally got back their lost empire and happiness.

The fourth lunar day of every fortnight is dedicated to Ganesha, and a fast may be observed on this day and the deity meditated upon and worshipped.

**Vasant Panchami**

Vasant Panchami or Sri Panchami is the first day of the Spring Season. It marks a change in the season and heralds the period of colour, mirth, gaiety, sweetness, fragrance and novelty. Vasant Panchami is celebrated on the fifth day of the light half of Magha (January-February). This day is specially dedicated to Saraswati, the goddess of learning, wisdom, fine arts and refinement.

On this day robes, yellow in colour are worn, and sweet rice, coloured in saffron is prepared. Yellow is a royal colour, and signifies warmth, glow auspiciousness, ripeness, maturity and spirituality. Saraswati is worshipped on this day poetical and musiscal gatherings are held on this day and chikren initiated to learn alphabets. In Bengal this day is observed as Sri Panchamif and the images of goddess Saraswati are taken out in grand and gay processions, after ceremonial worship, and then immersed in the holy Ganga or in any other stream or lake.

Saraswati is the goddess of speech, learning, fine arts and sciences; inventress of the Sanskirt language and Devnagari script. She is represented as of a white colour, without any superfluity of limbs, and of graceful figure, wearing a slender crescent on her brow and sitting on a lotus. The swan or peacock is her mount. She is shown playing Veena and is also called Veena Vadini, Vedas are believed to have sprung from her head, In the Vedic period she was a water deity, and a goddess of a river of the same name, now lost.

Kamadeva (Cupid), the god of love and romance, is also invoked and worshipped on this day, and fests are arranged in his honour. On this memorable day, Shiva burnt Kamadeva to ashes, by opening his third eye, while he tried to inspire Shiva with love. But on the intervention of his wife Rati, and other gods, Shiva allowed him to be reborn. He is shown riding a parrot, carrying a bow made of sugarcane, strung with a line of humming bees, and with it shouting the five darts of desire. He is accompanied by his wife Rati and his friend Vasanta (Spring). In Vedic times he represented creative moral foce and was not so frivolous as is now.

**Bhishma Ashtami**

Bhishma Ashtami falls on the eighth lunar day of light half of Magha (January-February). On this day Bhishma Pitamaha, the son of Shantanu and Ganga, passed ways, and his soul went on its journey to the heaven.

He was called Bhishma, because he had taken a terrible vow to remain always celibate. Bhishma literally means "terrible" and "dreadful'. Bhishma mas renowned for his continence, wisdom,

bravery and fidelity to his word. Since he did not marry, nor had any sons, it is our duty to offer him oblations and libations as his great-great-grandsons. Bhishma has rightly been designated as Pitamaha of all us. On this day shradha is performed and libations are offered with barley, sesame, flowers and Gangajal to Bhishma. Piety observed on this day ensures the best progeny.

The story of Bhishma is like this : Shantanu, in his irpe age, wanted to marry a young and beautiful damsel, but her parents did not allow it, because Bhishma (then called Devavrata) was heir to the throne, and if she bore sons they could not succeed. When it came to Bhishma's knowledge, he went to the girl's parents and vowed never to marry and have children, nor would he accept the crown. This satisfied her parents. The damsel was Matsyagandha Satyavati, and her father was a fisherman. Shantanu then married the damsel, and she bore him two sons. During the great war of Mahabharata Bhishma took the side of the Kauravas, and he was made commander in chief of the vast army. He did so because he had eaten the salt of Dhritarashtra and his sons. He did not like to betray his salt. In the war he was unfairly wounded from behind Shikhandin, by Arjuna. Shikhandin was an eunuch and so Bhishma did not attack him Bhishma was so wounded by the rain of arrows discharged by Arjuna, as that there was not a space of two fingers breadth left unwounded in his whole body. When he fell from his chariot he was upheld from the ground by the arrows and lay as on a couch of darts.

Bhishma remained on his death-bed of arrows for full fifty-eight days, and during this period, he delivered many religious dicourse He had attained a boon of fixing the time of his death and departure. So, he died on this auspicious day, when the sun had corssed to the north of the equator. Bhishma is a great example of self-denial, devotion and fidelity.

**Pongal**

Pongal is a three-day solemn festival, celebrated in South India on Sankarnti. Sankranti is a day when the sun passes from one sign of the Zodiac to another. Pongal or Makar-Sankranti marks the begining of the sun's northern course. Then, sun passes into

Capricornus from Sagittarius. It is an occasion of great rejocing and merry-making.

Pongal festival lasts three days. The first day is Bhogi-Pongal, the Pongal of Joy. On this day people exchange visits, sweets, presents, and pass the day in all kinds of amusements. The second day is Surya-Pongal, or the Pongal of the Sun. This day is deicated to the Sun. People get up early in the morning and first of all have their baths, etc. The married women then put rice to boil in milk on fire, and as soon as it begins to simmer, they all shout together, "Pongal I Pongal I" The sweet thus prepared is then offered to Sun and Ganesha. A portion of it is also given to the cows, and then it is taken by the people themselves.

Again, visits are exchanged. On meeting each other they ask "Has it boiled? To which they invariably answer "Yes, it is boiled". That is why this festival is called Pongal. Pongal means to boil.

The third day is Mattu Pongal or the Pongal of the Cows. On this day cows and oxen are worshipped and circumambulated. Their horns are panted in various colours, and garlands of leaves and flowers are hung round their necks. On this day the cows are allowed to graze anywhere they like, without any restraint. Pongal also markds the change of the season, and is primarily a harvest festival. India is an agricultural country and cows and oxen play a vital role in agriculture. That is why cows and oxen are worshipped and venerated so much. Pongal also symbolizes the sharing of things with others. The new reaped hervest is hared with friends, relatives, beasts and birds. They all partake in the cooked food and sweets.

**Makar Sankranti**

Makar Sankranti generally falls on January 14. It is a day of days and markds the beginning of auspicious time again. The beginning of the period, when the sun travels northwards, is considered highly favourable for auspicious activities. It is celebrated as Pongal in the South, but in the North it is observed as Makar Sankranti or Uttarayana Sankranti. On this day Hindus in thousands and thousands take a holy dip, in the Ganges and other holy streams. At

Ganga Sagar, where the river Ganga enters the sea, a grand fair and festival is held on this day. Devotees in large number reach the Sagar Island in boats, and bather there at a point where Ganga meets the sea.

There, the pilgrims visit the Ashram of sage Kapil, who according to our Puranas, had burnt to ashes the sixty thousand sons of the king Sagara of Ayodhya. Thes sixty thousand dead princes were subsequently revived and made to ascend heaven by the sacred waters of divine Ganga, Ganga, is it flowed over their ashes.

It is a very significant day, and so newly harvested corn is cooked for the first time and offered to Sun and other deities. The poor are fed and given clothes, money, etc, in charity. In the morning, after the bath, people offer libations to their dead ancestors and visit the temples. Bhishma Pitamaha waited on his couch of arrows, for a long period only for the conset of this auspicious season, before finally departing from here. In Assam it is called Magha Bihu or Bhogali Bihu, the festival of feasts. Bonfires are lighted in Assam on this day and the round of fasts and fun goes on for about a week.

In Punjab, it is observed as Lohir, tomark the end of winter and advent of summer Bonfires are lighted, and people dance to the fune of the drums, and sing folk songs around the fire Sweets made of sesame, groundnuts, puffed rice, etc., are thrown into the fire, and then eaten by the people themselves. Lohri is celebrated in cities, towns and village alike, with great enthusiasm and merry-making.

**Maghi Purnima**

The full moon day of Magha (January-February) is known as Maghi Purnima. It is a great bathing day, and as important as Kartika Purnima for the practice of peity and devotion. On this day fast is observed and charities are done. Early in the morning, after ablutions, the dead ancestors are offered libations, and the poor are given clothes, food, money, etc. Then Brahmins are fed and given dan-dakshina according to one's means and capacity.

As already stated, Magha is one of the four most secred months. Therefore, a bath in Ganga on this day is of high religious merit.

When Ganga is not accessible, because of any reason, one may bathe in any other holy stream, river, tank or pond, Moreover, Gangajal is kept almost in all the Hindu homes. Some of it may be poured into ordinary well water, and then used for bathing.

Bathing in India is a ritual, a ceremony, a festival and a great purifying act. A bath on such auspicious day as Purnima, is all the more significant. On this day great bathing festivals are held at various places along the banks of the holy rivers like Ganga, Yamuna, Sarayu, Narmada, Tapti, Kaveri, Krishan etc. People walk miles and miles to have a holy dip in the sea, or river or a lake on this day. A bath in the sea at Kanyakumari and Rameshwaram, is also highly prized. So is a dip at Pushkar. At Kumbhkonm, near Madras, there are great shrines of Sarangpani, Kumbeshwara and Nageshwara. There is a large sacred tank, where devotees take a holy dip on this day. It is believed that Ganga flow into this tank on this day. Once every 12 years, Kumbha Mela is also held here.

Magha Mela is held at Prayag (Allahabad) on this day, and over amillion devotees including pilgrims ascetics, mendicants, nagas, priests, etc, take a holy dip here. People observe fast and charity on this occasion.

**Float Festival**

On the full moon day of Magha (January-February), the Float Festival is celebrated at Madural. Madurai is famous for its majestic Minakshi Temple. Minakshi means the fisheyed goddess, and it is yet another name of Parvati. The major part of Minakshi temple was built during the reign of Tirumala Nayak (1623-55). Magha Purnima happens to be the birth day of king Tirumala Nayak.

On this day the images of Minakshi and Lord Sundareshwara (Shiva) are mounted on floats and taken to Marriamman Teppakulam Sarovar, which is some kms. east of Madurai. The deities are taken round this tank on floats richly decorated and illuminated, and then are drawn back and forth across the waters of the tank to the accompaniment of music and devotional songs before being taken back to Madurai. The tank is fed by

underground channels from the river Vaigai. In the centre of the tank there is an island, and on it a shrine. It was built in 1641 by King Tirumala Nayak.

The float festival is very popular and thousands of pilgrims and devotees collect here from all parts of the country on this occasion.

**Ravidas Jayanti**

Ravi Das, popularly known as Raidas, like Valmiki belonged to a depressed class. He was born on Ravivar (Sunday), in a Harijan family, in a village near varanasi, and was therefore, named Ravi Das. He was contemporary of another great saint Kabir.

Ravi Das was not much educated but possessed great insight and divine powers. He performed many miracles. He spent most of his time in meditation on the banks of the Ganges, in bhajan, kirtan and satsang. The rest of the time he engaged himself in making shoes. Shoe-making was his paternal profession. He composed many beautiful hymns in praise of God.

Like Kabir, Ravi Das also did a lot to bring a social change and reformation by his teachings and bhajans. That was a period of corruption, hypocrisy and religious intolerance. In the name of religion many ill-practices were in vogue. Ravi Das did his best to educate the masses by his own example and teachings. He believed in the essential unity and equality of life and in the tenet of work is also worship. He earned his bread with the sweat of his brow.

On Ravi Das Jayanti, procession bearing his portrait are taken out to the accompaniment of music through the main bazaars and streets of the city and towns. In temples dedicated to Ravi Das, his image is worshipped and prayed. At some places, feasts are also held on this occasion. Ravi Das was a great saint, and he symbolizes social unity and equality. His life and works are a great object lesson in nishkam karma yoga, and mutual brotherhood. In Varanasi special celebrations are being held on Ravi Das Jayanti

**Shivaratri**

Shivaratri is both a fastival and a vow to be observed. It means he "Night of Shiva" and is observed on Shiva Chaturdashi of

Phalguna, that is, on the fourteenth day of the dark half of Phalguna (February-March). It is celebrated by the Hindus of all faiths and castes all over the country. The devotees spend the whole night in the four watches in meditation, japa, kirtan and reading and recitation of Shiva Mahima Stotra and Shiva Tandava Stotra. The lingam symbol of Shiva is with Gangajal, milk, curds, honey and clarified butter. Bael leaves, dhatura fruit aak, flowers, etc, are also offered to Lord Shiva in puja. Beal leaves are very sacred and dear to Shiva.

Devotees in hundreds and thousands collect at the Shiva shrines and spend the whole night practising devotion and peity. Special puja celebrations are held at Varanasi, tarkeshwar, Baidyanath. Walkeshwar, Rameshwaram and Ujjain. At pashupatinath, in Nepal also, a grand celebration is held on this occasion. The devotes keep strict fast and do not take even a drip of water. As Mahadeva, he is worshipped by varous gods, including Brahma and Vishnu. He can easily be pleased to grant a desired boon. He is great and powerful god and one of the Hindu Trinity. He is Mahakala and destroys and desolves everything into nothingness, but he, as Shankara, also resorts and reproduces that which as been destroyed and dissolved. His symbol of phallus symbolizes this reproductive power. As a Mohayogi, the great ascetic, he combines in himself the highest perfection of austre penance and abstract meditiation. In this form he is a naked ascetic. Digambera "clothed with the elements". He ia also called Chandrashekhra, "moon-crested"; Gangadhara, "bearer of Ganga"; Girisha, "Mountain lord"; Kala, "time"; Maha-kala, "great time", Pashupati, "Lord of the beasts", Vihwanath, "Lord of the Universe"; etc.

A very interesting story is told by the devotees on this occcasion to underline the significance of the vow observed on this day. Onece, there was a hunter called Suswar. He lived near Varanasi. He earned his livelihood by killing and selling birds and beasts. One day he went on a hunting expedition, but was overtaken by darkness and could not return home. The forest was dense and full of terrible beasts of prey. For protection he climbed up a bael tree for the night. During the course of the night, he suffered the pangs of hunger and thirst on the one hand, on the other he was very

much worried about his dear wife, children and old mother at home, who had been waiting anxiously for his return.

In this great anxiety, he wept and began to pluck the bael leaves and dropped them down on the ground. Under the tree there was a Shiva-linga, and that night was Shivaratri. The hunter's worship, though performed unwittingly, highly pleased Shiva. Therefore, the hunter after his death, got place in the blissful abode of Lord Shiva, and after ages was reborn as a king, named Chitrabhanu. The king observed Shivaratri and did great penance on that day.

**Amalaka Ekadashi**

The Hindus have worshipful attitude towards all, whether they be trees or beasts, rivers or deities, animate or inanimate things, because the one Univeral Spirit pervades all. The Omnipresent is hiding in everything. Everythings is in him. He dwells in all, the witness, the sentient, all alone and devoid of attributes.

It is the conception of God or Reality that underlies the worship of trees. On Amalka Ekadashi, the Amla tree (Emblica Officinalis) is worshipped. This day is observed on the eleventh day of the light half of Phalguna. Hari lives in this tree as well. India is an agriculltural country, and the vital role of the trees in our life is all too evident.

After the morning ablutions, etc, Amalaka tree is ceremonially bathed and watered, and the worshipped. Fast is observed on this day and Brahmins given gifts, etc. From the piety observed on this day flows happiness, prosperity and beatitude. It also marks the beginning of Holi festival Generally Holi festival is being observed from Vasant Panchami, but from Amalka Ekadshi people start splashing coloured water on one another.

**Holi**

Holi is one of the four most popular festivals observed by all without any distinction of cast, creed, status or sex. It is observed on the full moon night of Phalguna. It marks the end of winter and the advent of spring season. It is a two-day festival. On the first night bonefire is lighted in the evening or night. Before being lit, it

is worshipped and offered water and grains, then people go round it to perform pradikshna. Children make merry, womenfolk sing gay songs and adults also sing phag to the accompaniment of cymbals and drums. People enjoy fun and like to play practical jokes on one another.

The next day, people amuse themselves by splashing coloured water and throwing coloured powder on their friends, relatives, neighbours and even passersby. Noisy and colourful processions are taken out through the bazaars and streets. In refined people it is characterized by songs, music, floral decoration and splashing of perfumed water. Sweets and visits are exchanged and cold drinks prepared at home, are served liberally. People forget all enmity and embrace each other, with warmth and love, and renew their friendship. New corn is baked an eaten on this day for the first time in the season.

There are several myths about the origin of the festival of Holi. According to one Puranic myth, there was a great demon Hiranyakasipu. He conquered all the three worlds and made the gods to serve him. He forbade practice of peity and worship of God, and instead declared himself God. People were made to worship him at the point of sword. But his son Prahlad, a mere child, a noble and great soul, was a great devotee of Vishnu and always chanted his name and sang his glories. It infuriated his demon father and he ordered ''Let this evil-soul child be killed'.

To kill Prahlad several fatal means were adopted, but none succeeded. At last a big fire was lighted and Prahlad was made to sit in her aunt Holika's lap and she then jumped into the fire. Holika claimed immunity from fire, but by the grace of God, Prahlad came out of the fire alive and unscathed but his aunt had died. The burning of Holi commemorates this event. It symbolizes the triumph of good over evil.

**Dol Purnima**

In Bengal Holi is celebrated as Dol Purnima. This festival is dedicated to Sri Krishna. On this auspicious day, an image of Krishna, richly adorned and besmeared with coloured powder, is

taken out in a procession, in a swinging palanquin, decorated with flowers, leaves, coloured clothes and papers. The procession proceeds forward to the accompaniment of music, blaring of conch shells, trumpets and shouts of Jai (victory).

Dol Purnima becomes all the more significant, because this is also the birthday of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1485-1533). He was a great Vaishnava saint, who popularized modern sankirtana. He elevated the passion of Radha and Krishna to a high spiritual plane. He underlined emotional at the cost of the ceremonial side of devotion. Followers of Chaitanya School of Vaishnavism, believe Chaitanya himself as a manifestation of Krishna. Chaitanay Mahaprabhu believed that the essence of sadhana is always the loving remembrance of Hari.

**Fasts And Festivals in Varsha: Shravana - Bhadrapada**

Vasanta is the Rituraj, Varsha is the Mother and Queen of all the Seasons, Copious Rains quench the thirst, make everything on earth rejoice, prolong life, heal, make plants and herbs comforth. Water is the basis of life, and we get it in the form of life giving Rains. It is during the months of Sharavana and Bhadrapada that the rain bearing masses of clouds burst open and release the water. A verse in Chandogya Upanishad says.

"Water, verily, is greater than food. Therefore, where there are no good rains, living beings are afraid that food will be scarce. But when there are good rains, living beings are happy, thinking, there will be much food. It is water in its different forms which is the earth, the atmosphere, heaven, the mountains, Gods and men, animals and birds, grass and trees, wild beasts, worms, flies and ants. All these forms are only waters. Mediate on water."

What wonder and beauty Varsha is, can be gleaned from the following passage from the Ramayana of Tulsidas:

"Clouds gather in the sky and thunders roar; but my darling is gone and my soul is in distress. The lighting flashes fitfully amid the darkness, like the friendship of the vile which never lasts. The pouring clouds cleave close to the ground, as sages stoop beneath accumulated love. The hills endure the buffeting of the rain drops,

as the virtous bear the abuse of the wicked. The flooded streamiets rush proudly along, like mean men puffed up with a little wealth. The water by its contact with the earth becomes as muddy as the soul when caught in the web of illusionl Drop by drop the waters gather and fill the ponds, like as when the quality of goodness develops in a good man; and the rivers flow into the bosom of the ocean, like as the soul, that has found Hari, is at rest for ever.

"The green earth is so choked with grass that the paths can no longer be distinguished, like holy boods obscured by the wranging of heretics.

'On all sides, there is a lively croaking of frogs, like a class of Brahmana students repeating the Vedas. All the trees put forth their new leaves, like pious souls that have come to matured wisdom. The aka and javasa plants have shed their leaves; as in a well-governed realm the schemes of the wicked come to nought. Search as you like the dusty fottpath is no longer to be traced; like as when religion is put out of sight by passion. The earth rich with crops makes as godly s show as the prosperity of benevolent. The fireflies gleam in thedarkness of the cloudy night like a mustered hand of hypocrites. The ridges so the fields are broken down by the heavy rains, like women ruined by too much license. The diligent cultivators weed their land, like philosophers who tif themselves of ignorance, vanity and pride. The cakva and other birds are no whjere to be seen, like virtue that fled at the coming of the iron age. However, much it may rain, no grass springs upon barren ground, so lust takes no root in the heart of Hari's worshippers. The earth gleams with swarms of living creatures of every kind; so the subjects multiply under good government. Here and there weary wayfarers stay and rest, like a man's bodily senses after the attainment of wisdom."

This whole season itself is a long festivity. A great number of our sacred days, fairs and festivals occur during these two months. Some of these include Nag Panchami, Tulsi Jayanti, Raksha Banddhan, Onam, Ganesh Chaturthi, Janmashtami, Anant

Chaturdashi and many others.

**Hariyali Teej**

This festival falls on the third day of the bright half of Shravana. Primarily it is a women's festival. It is also known as Hari Tritiya. On this day women of all ages make merry; daughters and daughter-in-laws are given gifts, and the swings hung in the houses and gardens are enjoyed in abundance. Ladies sing gay songs and "Malhars".

It is celebrated on a large scale in Uttar Pradesh and espercially in Braj Mandal. Preparation of local sweets in homes is its another highlight.

**Nag Panchami**

Nag Panchami is observed on the 5th day of the bright half of Shravana (July-August). On this day nagas, cobras and snakes are worshipped with milk, sweets, flowers, lamps and even sacrifices. The images of Naga deities made of silver, stone, wood (or painted on the wall) are first bathed with water and milk, and then worshipped with the reciting of the following mentras:

Snakes and cobras are held in awe and reverence in India. They are worshipped and offered prayers on Nag Panchami Fast is kept and brahmins are fed on this day. The piety observed on this day is considered a sure protection against the fear or snake-bite. At many places real cobras and snakes are worshipped and fairs held. On this day digging the earth is prohibited, because the serpents live under the earth or the nether world and digging may hurt or annoy them. The various Puranas like Agni Purana, Skanda Purana, Narad Purana, etc., give details of snake-worship and its significance.

The Nagas, as mythical creatures are semi-divine beings. They are said to have sprung from Kadru, the wife of Rishi Kashyapa, and inhibit Patal or the regions below the earth, where they reign in great splendour. They roam about the land wearing lustrous jewels and ornaments. The thousandhooded Shesha Nag or Ananta is the most powerful of them and reverence even by the gods. He bears the whole earth like a chaplet on this crown. When he nods or

yawns, the earth with its oceans and mountains, begins to tremble.

Nag panchami is also observed as Bhratri panchami and women having brothers worship snakes, their holes and keep fast to propitate Nagas against the evil of snake-bites to their beloved brothers. The serpent genii in India have semi-human physiology. Their families are handsome, and some of them intermarried with men, as Ulupt with Arjuna. The snake-deties are also regarded as the custodians of the treasures of land and sea.

**Tulsi Jayanti**

Tulsidas Jayanti is celebrated on the 7th day of the bright half of Shravana. The great saint-poet Tulsidas was contemporary to Akbar the Great. He was born of Brahmin parents, but soon became an orphan, and was brought up andeducated by a saint named Narharidas. Narharidas was instructed to do so by God in a dream. It is he, who gave him the mantra of ''Ram-nam''. Tulsi married and started living the life of a householder, but some chance words of his wife awakened in him his ardent Bhakti towards God, and he became a sanyasi and began to live at Varanasi.

There he wrote his so well-known ''Ramacharitra Manas'' besides a dozen other books. He wrote his masterpiece in the language of the common people for the benefit of the masses. In the words of Grierson, ''Over whole of the Gangetic valley his work is better known than the Bible is in England''. His Ramayana is verily the life-breath of the devout Hindus.

In no uncertain terms, he has emphasized the significance of the path of devotion or Bhakti as a means of spiritual evolution and final liberation. He lays stress on the constant repetition of Ram-nam, because in this Iron Age (Kali-kal) knowledge, yoga, samadhi and dispassion are of litte avail. Therefore, constantly repeat the name of Rama with unwavering faith. Greater than austerity, pilgrimage, oblation, discipline and fasts is the repetition of the name of Hari.

His own saintly example and the magic of his writings has done more for the spiritual upliftment of the masses than the teachings of

hundreds of gurus. He and his works are so greatly revered that tradition regards him as Valmiki reborn.

It is believed that he died on the same tithi, and a couplet is often quote in this connection:

On the auspicious day of his Jayanti and Moksha, fast is kept, charities are done. Ramayana is read and recited. Brahmins are fed, and Lord Rama, along with his consort Sita and devotee Hanuman, is worshipped with great religious fervour. In literary and social circles, discussions, lectures, seminars and symposiums are organised on his teachings, life and works.

**Putrada Ekadashi**

This is observed on the 11th day of the bright half of Shravana. As the name itself shows, it is observed particularly by the sterile parents in order to get a son. The observance of fast and piety on this day is said to result in getting a son, and it also destroys the sins of the aspirants. Like other Ekadshis; it also dedicated to Lord Vishnu.

Fast is observed, Vishnu is worshipped and meditated upon, and the Brahmins, learned in the Vedas and sacred religious lore, are fed and given robes, money, etc., in charity on this day. At night the aspirants should sleep in the room where Vishnu has been worshipped.

A legend in this connection goes:

In ancient days there was a king called Mahijit who ruled the earth from his capital Mohishmati. He was very wise. rich, religious, powerful and peace-loving, but he was without issues. It was a source of great worry to him day and night. One day he called all his learned, wise and intellectual people, seers and rishis into an assembly and put before them his problem.

In the assembly there was Rishi Lomesh, most learned holy person and knower of the Brahman. He told the king that in the previous birth he had prevented a cow from drinking from a pond on the Ekadashi falling on the bright fortnight of Shravana. And thereby he had incurred a curse of remaining without a son. Now, if he

propitiates the gods and atones for his sins by observing fast and piety on this day, he can be blessed with a son. At night he should keep the vigil and spend his time in meditation and chanting the praises of Lord Hari.

The king and the queen did accordingly. They observed a strict fast, gave jewels, money, robes, elephants, horses and cows to the Brahmins in charity; meditated upon Vishnu and kept the night vigil on that day. Consequently, after 12 months they were blessed with a handsome son and an heir to the throne.

Similarly the Ekadashi falling in the dark half of the Shravana should be observed. This Ekadashi is known as Kamada Ekadashi, the wishfulfilling Ekadashi.

**Narili Purnima**

On the full moon day of Shravana is celebrated Narieli Purnima to appease the fury of the Sea-god Varuna. It also marks the end of monsoon, and is primarily observed by sailors, fishermen and others, living in the coastal areas of South India. They offer coconut to the sea on this occasion. It the sea happens to be far away people go to some nearby tank, pool, river or some other source of water and offer the coconut.

**Jhulan Yatra**

On Shravana Purnima this festival is observed in Orissa. It falls in August. On this day Swinging Festival of Lord Jagannath is celebaated. In lavishly decorated swings Lord Jagannath is given to relax to the accompaniment of music and dance. The celebration is particularly observed in the Jagannath Temple at Puri and other shrines and mathas of the town for a week preceding the Shravana Purnima. The full moon day of the month marks the culmination and end of the festival.

**Raksha Bandhan**

The festival of Raksha Bandhan is observed on the full moon day of Shravana (July-August). The world "Raksha" means protection. On this auspicious day women and girls tie an amulet-like thread round the right hand wrists of their brothers as a taken of protection

against evil during the ensuing year. The thread is called "Rakhi" and is made of a few colourful cotton or silk twisted threads. It can also be prepared from the threads of gold or siver. The brothers give their sisters gifts of money, clothes and other valuable things in return. Sisters feed their brothers with sweets, dry fruits and other delicacies on this occasion.

Priests and Brahmins also tie this kind of thread round the wrists of the right hands of their patrons and receive gifts. They recite a mantra or a sacred formula while doing so to charge the thread with the power of protection..

The thread charged with the power of the mantra protects the wearer from the possible evils.

According to Hindu scriptures Sachi, the consort of Indra, the god of heaven, tied such a mantra charged thread round the rith wrist of her husband when he was disgraced in the battle by the demon forces. Indra again fought and gained a convincing victory over the demons, and recovered his lost sapital Amaravati. The sacred amulet helped him, in defeating the enemy.

In South India, it is celebrated as Avani Avittam. Holy thread (Upanayna) is changed and libation of water is offered to the ancestors and rishis on this occasion. The new thread is worshipped with saffron and turmeric paste before wearing, and the old one is discarded in the water of a pool, tank or a river. This day is specially significant for a Brahmin boy who has recently been invested with an upanayan (holy thread). It reminds him of the glorious religious significance. Vedas are also read and recited on this day.

In Bombay coconuts are offered to the sea-god Varuna on this occasion. Exchange of sweets, setting up of fairs, visiting the relatives and friends, sending the "rakhis' by post to brothers living at far of places, and remembering the Rishis and Gurus whom we are indebted for their guidance and spiritual knowledge, are other highilights of this festival.

**Shravani Mela**

In the sacred month of Shravana, a grand fair is held in Bihar at Deogher. Durings this month devotees pick up water from the holy Ganga at Sultanganj and carry it on their shoulders to Deoghar and offer it on Shiva Lingam. The 100 kms. distance from Sultanganj to Deoghar, is covered by trekking. All along the long route the pilgrims go on chanting "Bal Bami Bol Bam!" Thousands and thousands of them, all clad in saffron carry the sacred water in kanwars, continue trekking day and night in rains or scorshing sun to their destination. In the shrine at Deoghar pilgrims throng in a large number carrying Ganga jal and shouting. 'Bol Bom!" They present a unique and unforgettable sight.

Onam is the most famous festival of Kerala. It is celebrated in the Malyalam month of Chingam, corresponding to Bhadara (August-September). It is a harvest festival characterised by four days of feasting, merry-making and famous snake' boat races. These boats may be paddled by up to 100 persons. The snake boat race of Alleppey, hald annually in August, is most prominent of all. The number of the paddlers rowing a boat indicates the affluence of the man whom it belongs to.

A clay moulded image of Vamana, the fifth incarnation of Vishnu is worshipped on this day in the temples and the houses. The youngers are given gifts of clothers and other things by the elders. The second day of the festivity, Bali is believed to visit his kingdom in Kerala. The Puranas relate a very interesting story about Vamana and Bali:

"Bali was a virtuous demon king. He was the son of Virochana and grandson of Prahlad. He did great tapas and defeated Indra and extended his rule and authority over the three worlds. The harassed and humiliated gods prayed Vishnu for protection, and he incarnated himself as Vamana, the son of Aditi and Kashyapa. Relying on Bali's reputation for charity, Vamana approached him and begged him the gift of three paces of land for making a sacrificial altar. As soon the gift was given, Vamana grew into an enormous size, and then by taking two paces he measured all the earth and the heavens, and thus won back the whole of Bali's

kingdom for the gods. But then being reminded of Bali's merris, generosity and other qualities, he stopped short, and left to Bali the nether regions or the Patal Loka. Bali is also called Mahabali, and his capital was Mahabalipuram, near Madras.

Bali was also permitted by Vamana to visit his lost kingdom and the subjects once a yeear, and this visit is regularly celebrated in Kerala, and particularly in Molabr by his devotees on Onam. To welcome their ancient good King Bali, the people of Kerala tidy up their houses and environs, decorate the houses with flowers and leaves and also arrange grand feasts and many types of amusements. The spectacular snake-boat race mark the crowining glory of these amusements and games.

**Tirupati Festival**

In the month of Bhadra (August-September), a grand festival is held annually at Tirupati, the seat of Lord Venkteshwara, a manifestation of Lord Vishnu. The festival lasts for 10 days, and during it devotees from all over the country congreagte here to seek Lord Venkteshwara's blessings for various gains in material and spiritual spheres. Even on ordinary days over 20,000 pilgrims, on an average, hurry here to pray and worship the deity. A pilgrimage to this shrine may also result from a vow taken in some difficulty. An umbelievable mammoth crowd ques up for hours every day to have a darshan of the deity.

This, one of the richest temples in the world, is situated on Tirumala hills, seven in number, which correspond to the seven hoods of the snake-god Adishesha, who forms the bed of Vishnu in the ocean. Add because of these seven picturesque hills Venkteshwara is also known as the "Lord of the Seven Hills." The various Purnanas describe how and why this is an essential pilgrimage centre for each and every devout Hindu. It is a tradition here that devotees, whether men or women, shave their hair off as a votive offering for a vow fulfilled. Parents bring their very young children and perform their first tonsure at the lotus feet of the Lord.

**Ganesh Chaturthi**

Ganesh or Vinayak Chaturthi is one of the most popular Hindu

festival, celebrated all over the land, as a birthday of Lord Ganesha, the elephant-headed God, on the fourth day of the bright half of Bhadra (August-September). The clay moulded figures of Lord Ganesha are worshipped during this festival and then immersed into the sea, river, pool or some other such water. Ganesha is the God of wisdom, learning, prudence, success and power. His names are repeated in the beginning of every thing. As Vighnesha or the remover of the obstacles, he is propitiated at the start of every activity, Whether it be a journey, marriage, initiation, house construction, the writing of a book or even that of a letter.

He is great scribe and learned in the religious lore and scriptures. It was Ganesha, who at the dictation of the seer Vyasa, wrote the Mahabharata. He is also the Lord of Ganas, the Shiva's hosts. He bears a single tusk (*ek danta*) and holds in his four hands a shell, adiscus, a goad and a lotus and is always accompanied by his mount, the rat. Ganesha is a great lover of sweets and fruits. He is also the presiding deity of Muladhara Chakra (plexus) or the psychic centre in the human body where the Kundalini Shakti resides.

There are two very interesting myths about his birth and how he came to possess the head of an elephant. One myth relates that disliking Lord Shiva's surprise visits during her baths, Parvati formed her scurf into a man's figure and gave it life. Then, she placed Ganesha to guard her bath-house entrance. Shiva came and tried to enter but when he found his way barred he cut off his head. It greatly angered Parvati, and so ultimately Shiva and to sendsomeone to fetch another head for Ganesha. The first creature found by him was an elephant. Its head was brought and planted on Ganesha's shoulders.

Another version says that Parvati was blessed with a beautiful son. All the gods assembled to see and admire the son of Shiva- Parvati. They all gazed at the child except Shani, because he was under a curse, which caused any being he looked at to be burnt to ashes. Parvati insisted that Shani also looked at and admired her son. No sooner, did Shani do so than Ganesha's head was burnt to ashes. Parvati cursed Shani for having killed his son, but Brahma

intervened and comforting told her that if the first available head were planted on her son's shoulders, he would be alive again. So Vishnu set forth on Garuda and the first creature he found was an elephant sleeping beside a river. He cut off its head and it was fixed on Ganesha's trunk.

Similarly there is another interesting story which relates why he has only one tusk, On Ganesh Chaturth, the images of Ganesha are worshipped with sweet balls laddoos or modakas), water, new raiments, incense, flowerss scent, betel eaf and nivaidyas (food) offerings). His mantra is repeated, he is meditated upon and worshipped and the naivaidya distrubuted as Prasad. Brahmins are fed and given gifts. In Maharashtra this festival is observed with great religious fervour, pomp, gaiety and eclat and Ganesha idols are taken out is grand processions before immersion into the sea.

**Haritalika Teej**

Haritalika fast (vow) is observed on the 3rd day of the bright half of Bhadra (August-September). This fast is observed by the Hindu women to honour the goddess Parvati and by the Hindu women to honour the goddess Parvati and her consort Shiva, and their idols are worshipped ritually. Parvati, the daughter of Himalaya and Mena, desirous of having Shankara as her husband, did severe tapas and finally had him as her Lord and husband. From that day onwards the married women worship the divine couple, and keep strict fast to ensure their conjugal happiness and prosperity. Unmarried girls do so to have suitable husbands of their choice. Brahmins are given money, etc., in charity, unmarried girls are fed and the aspirant women tell the story of Haritalika among themselves and break the fast in the evening.

The next morning the sun is worshipped and offered water.

**Rishi Panchami**

Rishi Panchami fast and ritual are observed on the fifth day of the bright half of Bhadra (August-September). This day, its piety and acts of devotion are dedicated to the Sapta Rishis or the Seven Seers, mental sons of Brahma. They are : Bhrigu, Pulastya, Kratu, Pulaha, Marichi, Atri and Vashistha. It is primarily a women's fast

and festival, but can be observed even by a man for the well-being and happiness of his wife.

An earthen or copper pitcher, filled with water, is installed on an altar sanctified with cow dung, and eight petalled lotus is also made thereon. Then, the seven Seers are worshipped, with betel leaf, flowers, camphor and lamp. Then the Sapta Rishis are prayed and worshipped. Devi Arundhati, the wife of Rishi Vasishtha, a model of conjugal excellence, is also worshipped along with the Seven Sages.

Only fruits are taken on this day when breaking fast, and salt, milk, ghee and sugar are not taken at all. Brahmins are given dakshina by the aspirants and it pleases the Seven Seers and the gods.

**Janmashtami**

On the eighth day of the black half of Bhadra (August-September) was born Shri Krishna, the eighth Avtar or incarnation of Vishnu. Therefore, this day is well-known as Janmashtami or Krishna-Janmashtami. This auspicious day of birth of Krishna, the direct manifestation of Vishnu himself, is celebrated in all parts of India with eclat and great enthusiasm In the Bhagvad Gida Krishna declares: "All this Universe has been created by me; all things exist in me", supreme dwelling, the eternal person, divine prior to the Gods, unborn, omnipresent". His life is celebrated in great detail in the Puranas like Harvamsha and Shrimad Bhagvatam. The circumstances in which he was born were quite peculiar and mysterious. He incarnated himself primarily to destroy evil and wickedness and to establish Dharma.

The demon King Kansa was a great and dreaded tyrant, but he loved his sister Devaki, and at her marriage with Vasudeva, he, out of great affection, drove their marriage chariot. Then, all of a sudden an orcale told him that eighth born of Devaki shall be the cause of his doom and death.

At this he would have killed her then and there, but for the intervention of Vasudeva and their promise to give him over each and every child born to them. They kept their promise, and Kansa killed all of their seven children one after the other to a great

suffering and grief of the couple. They were kept in the prison under strict watch and in chains and locks. So, Krishna was born as their eighth son in the happened, with divine grace, that the guards fell asleep, their chains loosened and locks and the gates of the prison cell opened Vasudeva took the child Krishna to Nanda's House in Gokula and exchanged him for a baby girl born there to Yashoda. When Kansa heard of the birth of girl child, he at once rushed to the prison cell, and lifted the female child high, catching it by the feet and was about to dash her against a rock, when it slipped from Kansa's grip and assuming the beautiful form of the Divine Mother vanished saying, "Wretch I thy destroyer is flourishing in Gokula". There was a great joy and rejoicing in Gokula at the birth of a son to king Nanda and queen Yashoda. Yashoda was quite unaware of the exchange that had taken place during the night.

The Jnamashtami celebrations start right from the early moning with bath in sacred waters and prayers, etc., but the climaxes reaches in the midnight with the rising of the moon, which marks the divine birth. On this auspicious day, strict fast is kept and broken only after the birth of Krishna at midnight. the temples and homes are decorated, scenes depicting Krishna's birth and his childhood pranks, etc, are staged with models both living and inanimate. Child Krishna's image is put into a richly decorated swing and rocked with a tender care all the day by the devotees. At night after birth, a small image of toddling Krishna is bathed in Charnamrita, amidst chanting of hymns, blaring of the conches, ringing of the bells and joyous shouting of "Victory to Krishna".

In Braja Mandala, especially in Gokula and Mathura, this festival is celebrated with greatest possible religious fervour and enthusiasm and the special deliberations of the day are relayed on the air. People from distant places congregate to Mathura and Vrindavana on this day to participate in the festival. The piety and fast observed on this day ensure birth of many good sons, and salvation after death. Reading and recitation of the Bhagvatam and Geet Govindam are most recommended on this day..

## Hala Shashti

It is also known as Balaram Shashti, and is observed on the sixth day of the dark half of Bhadra. Balram, the elder brother of Krishna, was born on this day. Our scriptures say that Vishnu took two hairs, a white and another black, and these became Balarama and Krishna, the sons of Devaki. As soon as Balarama was born, he was carried away to Gokula to preerve his life from the tyrant Kansa, and he was brought up there as a child of Rohini. He and Krishna grew together and took active part in many adventures which included the killing of many demons. He was a preceptor both of Bhima and Duryodhana. He had refused to side either with the Pandavas or the Kauravas. Balarama died just before Krishna, as he sat under a banyan tree in the outakirts of Dwaraka.

Balarama's weapon was a plough, so it is called Hala (Plough) Shashti. On this day fast is kept by the women to ensure happiness, prosperity and longevity to their sons and only buffalo milk and curds are taken. The plough is also worshipped on this day. This fast, primarily a rural affair, is observed with much enthusiasm in northern India.

After morning oblutions, a small piece of ground is sanctified and plastered with cowdung, etc., and a tiny water pool is dug in it and then the branches of ber (jujube plum), gular (a kind of fig tree) and palash (Butea Frondosa) are planted there in and worshippd.

Unmarried girls observe the Chandar Shashti on this day, and fast, which is terminated with the rising of the moon in the night, whom they offer water and worship.

## Radha Ashtami

The eight day of the moon is aiways Shakti's own day and so is the ninth. Radha Ashtami is celebrated on the eighth day of the dark fortnight of Bhadra (August-September) On this tithi was Radha born. She was an incarnation of Lakshmi and worshipped accordingly. Radha, the favourite mistress and consort of Krishna, during his Vrindavana days, she is also a symbol of human soul drawn to the ineffable god. Krishna, or as the pure divine love to which the fickle love returns.

On this day after early morning ablutions, the image of Radha is bathed in Panchamrita and then richly adorned and ornamented before offering food and worship. Fast is kept on this day and Prasa distributed.

**Anant Chaturdashi**

It falls on the 14th day of the bright fortnight of Bhadra (August-September). On this auspicious day Vishnu sleeping on the bed of Ananta (the Serpent Shesha), in the milky ocean is worshipped and meditated upon. While Vishnu slumbers on Ananta, his consort Lakshmi massages her feet.

On this day fast is observed and fruits, sweets, flowers, etc., are offered to Vishnu in worship. A raw thread coloured in turmeric paste and having 14 knots is also tied on the upper right arms while meditating on Shesha-sayi Vishnu. This ensures protection against eveil, prosperity and happiness. The Pandava princes in exile were advised by Sri Krishna to observe this fast to regain their lost kingdom and prosperity. They did accordingly, and then were able to defeat the evilminded Kaurvas and regain their lost kingdom, wealth, reputation and happiness.

**Partyshana Parva**

It is a Jain festival, and is celebrated by both the Svetambar and the Digamber sects in the month of Bhadra (August-September). The Svetambar Jains start observing it in the dark half of the month from the 13th day up to the fifth day of the bright falf for eight days. But the Digambar (the sky-clad) Jains begin to observe it from the fifth day of the bright half of Bhadra and terminate it after eight days on the 13th lunar day. This festival signifies a man's emergence into a new world of spiritual and moral refinement from that of gross and depraved world.

The ten cardinal virtues cultivated during this festival are : forgiveness, charity, simplicity, contentment, truthfulness, self-restraint, fasting, detachment, humility and continence. During the festival all the above ten virtues are lectured upon by the Jain saints and their cultivation stressed upon.

All the days of the celebration, the devout Jains keep fast, sat only once in a day, worship the Tirthandaras, and try to imbibe the qualities and virtues of great Jain saints and preachers. This is also the occasion of self-analysis and criticism and to do away with ones own shortcomings, etc. The Jains ask for one another's forgiveness during this festival for an offence done knowingly of unknowingly. Thus, is also helps in restoring lost relations and friendship.

**Fasts and Festivals in Vasanta: Chaitra-vaisakha**

Seasons are spokes in the Wheel of Time. They are the foundation and basis of the changes in nature. Thus, they occupy a special significance in our life. As such, Seasons may be called the unique gift of the Mother Earth to mankind and other living beings. We all are of the earth and earthy. Everything here is for our enjoyment. The seasons come and go with a marked regularity. Everything on this earth is seasonal, and so are our festivals, fasts and auspicious days and feasts. Seasons bring them in their with unfailing punctuality.

Every season is a change, a fresh beginning, a new hope and a happy transformation. A Vedic hymn beautifully under lines their trains significance and relation to men:

"Your circling seasons, years, nights succeeding days,

Your summer, O Earth, your splashing rains, your autumn,

Your winter and fosty season yielding to sping.

May each and all produce for us their milk."

The Hindu Year begins with Spring. The months of Chaitra and Vaisakha form the Spring proper. Chaitra is called so because during this month, the moon stands in the Constellation of Chaitra on the full moon day. All the other eleven months are named after the constellation in which the moon stands on Purnima. During Chaitra-Vaisakha the nature is in full bloom and the Season is at its best. Vasanta has rightly been designated the King of Seasons. Vasanta is also a close associate of Kam Deva (Cupid).

Kalidas, the prince of Sanskrit poets, waxes eloquent in describing

the charms of Spring, in his so famous a poem called "Seasons".

Their blossom—burden weights the trees;
The winds in fragrance move;
The lakes are bright with lotuses,
The woman bright with love;
The days are soft, the evenings clear
And charming; everything
That moves and lives and blossoms, dear,
Is sweeter in the spring.

The groves are beautifully bright
For many and many a mile

With Jasmine-flowers that are as white
As loving women's smile;
The resolution of a saint
Might well be tried by this;
For more, young hearts that fancies paint
With dreams of loving bliss.

Our fairs, fasts, festivals, feasts and religious observance are intimately connected with the advent and termination of the seasons. In Spring we have many important celebrations and observances. They include Gangaur, Ramnavami, Mahavir Jayanti, Baisakhi, Buddha Purnima, Pooram and many others. These festivals, fasts and sacred days cut across all boundaries in their popularily, mass appeal and kaleidoscopic view.

**Gudi Padva**

Gudi Padva is mainly celebrated in Maharashtra on the first day of Chaitra (March-April). Chaitra Pratipada marks the beginning of the Hindu New Year. People get up early in the morning, tidy up their houses, have ablutions and wear festive and new clothes. Women decorate their houses with Rangolis. A silk banner is raised and worshipped and then greetings and sweets are exchanged.

**Ugadi Parva**

The Ugadi Parva ushers in the New Year for the people in Andhra. On the first day of the Chaitra month this festival is observed with

gay abundance and people visit one another, enjoy feasts and wear new clothes. It being an auspicious day new ventures are started. The festive day begins with ritual bath and prayers, and continues till late night. The purohita makes predictions by reading his almanac on this Telugu New Year Day. It is believed that Brahma created the world on this very day. Lord Vishnu is also said to have incarnated himself as Matsya (the Fish Incarnation) on this day. Brahma is especially worshipped on this day.

**Gangaur**

It is primarily a women's festival, and is celebrated on the third day of the bright half of Chaitra (March-April). It is a great local festival in Rajasthan, and is also celebrated in many parts of northern India with great fervour. Gangaur is actually an 18-day festival culminating on the final day. The celebrations start right from the next day of Holi with worship and prayers to Gauri. Gauri is the most fair and benign aspect of Durga, the consort of Shiva.

Both the married women and unmarried girls worship the goddess every day during the festival with durva grass, flowers, fruits and bright brass pots filled with fresh water. The married women seek Gauri's blessings for faithful conjugal happiness and bliss, while the virgins pray for a suitble handsome husband and future marital prosperity.

In the Ramcharitra Manas we find Sita coming to the shrine of Girija or Gauri early in the morning, accompanied by her lovely companions and attendants singing glad.songs. After ablutions, Sita approaches the goddess with a cheerful heart and a contemplative mind, and after adoration paid with much devotion, she begs to Gauri a handsome and well matched bridegroom. And finally her wish is fullilled when Rama wins her hand in marriage.

On the final day of Gangaur festival, the ladies keep strict fast, worship the goddess, wear colourful raiments and ornaments, exchange sweets, and the wooden or earthen images of Gangaur (Shiva-Parvati) are taken in procession through the main bazaars and streets to the accompaniment of music for the ceremonial immersion in the nearby lake or tank.

**Shitala Ashtami**

Shitala Ashtami, as the name itself indicates, is observed on the eighth day of the bright half of Chaitra (March-April) to honour goddess Shitala. She is the goddess of smallpox and her blessings are invoked for protection against this evil. Shitala is depicted as roaming the countryside riding an ass. She is to be identified with Devi or Durga in her role as goddess of smallpox. On this day, which is either on Monday or Friday, the women folk visit the Shitala shrine in the morning, after ablutions, and offer rice, home-made sweets, cooked food and holy water mixed with milk. At several places colourful fairs are held on this occasion near the shrine of Shitala and there is a lot of merry-making, songs, dance, feasting and brisk buying and selling.

**Ashokastami**

Chaitra Shukla Ashtimi is also celebrated as Ashokastami in Orissa. A Car Festival of Lingaraja at Bhubaneshwar is held on the pattern of the Car Festival of Lord Jagannath at Puri. The Protege of Lord Lingaraja is taken out in a giant wooden chariot to Rameshwar Temple, about 2 kms. from tho Lingaraja Temple and returned after a four-day stay there. It is a major local festival and witnessed by thousands of devotees and spectators.

**Ramanavami**

Ramanavami or the birthday of of Lord Rama is major Hindu festival celebrated all over the country by devout Hindus both Vaishnavas and Shaivas. Rama, the seventh incarnation of Vishnu was born of the ninth day of the bright half of the Chaitra (March-April) in Ayodhya, in the Treta Youga, the Second Age. There is one God, desireless, formless, uncreated,True Being, Consciousness and Bliss, the supreme spirit, the all pervading, whose shadow is the world; who incarnates himself as Rama or Krishna and does many things, only for the love that he bears to his devotees; who in his mercy ever refrains from anger those whom he loves and knows to be his own. Adi Kavi Balmiki in his celebrated Ramayana describes the advent of Rama thus:

"Then after the exipiry of six seasons and on the completion of the



twelfth month, on the ninth lunar day of the month of Chaitra under the star Punarvasu, with the Sun, Mars. Saturn, Jupiter and Venus at Aries, Capricorn, Libra, Cancer and Pisces, and when the Moon with Jupiter entered Cancer of the Zodiac, Kaushalya gave birth to great and prosperous Rama with mighty arms, rosy eyes and scarlet lips, the joy of Dashratha and the adored of all people. He bore all auspicious marks on his fair body."

The Ramayana means the "Ways of Rama". It is held in the greatest possible reverence because it embodies the best of human ideals and a living sum of Indian character. As a popular religious epic and great literary work nothing can inspire and enthuse us more than the Ramayana. A verse in the end of Ramacharitra Manas reads%

"There is no age to compare the Age of Iron (Kaliyuga; in it, if a man has only faith and devotes himself to praising Ram's spotless virtues, he escapes from the sea of birth and death without further

trouble. Religion has been revealed with four feet; in the Iron Age one is of the most importance; to whomsoever God has given let him practice almsgiving and prosper."

A fair idea of the Ramayana's immense popularity can be had from the fact that there are about 350 visions of it in Hindi alone, and the name of Rama, as "Ramal Ramal" or Jai Ramji kil, is a common form of salutation among the masses.

The Ramanavami festival offers to us all an opportunity to imbibe at least some of the ideals and spirit enshrined in the ways of Rama. On this great day Lord Rama is prayed to and worshipped, and it is the surest means to be able to follow in his ideals. One who approaches his lotus feet with love, devotion and humility becomes noble, large hearted, pious, peaceful, master of senses and beloved of the wise. On this sacred day you should observe fast and practice charities. You should visit a temple of Rama early in the morning after bath etc. You can also make a small shrine at home and install a picture of Sri Rama- Panchayatan in it and ofter prayers and puja.

In Ayodhya, the birth place of Sri Rama, great celebrations are there, the temples are decorated, Ramayana is read and recited and grand fair is held. At other places also icons of Rama, along with Sita and Hanuman is richly adorned and worshipped and other acts of devotion and piety are observed. Chanting of the holy name of Rama, Sankirtanas and holding of lectures and discourses on Rama's life and teachings, for the benefit of the audience, are a common feature of the celebrations. People take vow to devote themslves more to their spiritual and moral evolution on this occasion. Really, Ramnam is a great magic formula (mantra) and a wish-fulfilling tree (Kalpa Vriksha), and must be repeated, recited and meditated upon every now and then. Tulsidas has said that place the name of Rama on your tongue, like a jewelled lamp on the threshold of the door, and there will be light, as you will, both inside and out.

Ramanavmi is also celebrated as the Vasanta Navratra and the celebration starts from the first lunar day of the bright fortnight of Chaitra and lasts upto Ramanavami. On Ashtami Durga is worshipped. A fast is observed all the nine days and Durga- saptsati

is read and an earthen pitcher filled with water is installed. Some fast only on the first and the last day of the period. Rama and Lakshmana had also performed worship to mother Durga before killing Ravana. If you wish to achieve anything worthwhile, seek the Mother's grace and it is a proper occasion. Ram and Devi, both symbolize the victory of good over the evil.

**Mahavir Jayanti**

India has produced many great saints and spiritual leaders. The days commemorating the birthdays or the incidents in the lives of these great sons of the soil, are considered especially holy. The birthday of Lord Mahavira is observed by both the Digambra (sky-clad) and Svetambra (white-clad) Jains on the 13th day of the bright half of the Chaitra month (March-April). This birth anniversary is celebrated throughout the Jain world in the country, but it is celebrated with special charms in Rajasthan and Gujarat, where the Jains are relatively in greater number than in the other states. Jain pilgrims from all over the country congregete at the ancient Jaina shrines at Girnar and Palitana in Gujarat and at Mahavirji in Rajasthan. Pawapuri and Vaishali in Bihar are the other such centres. Vaishali being his birth place, a grand festival is held there, and it is known as Vaishali Mahotsava.

On this auspicious day grand chariot processions with the images of Mahavira are taken out, rich ceremonies in the temples are held, fasts and charities are observed, Jaina scriptures are read and at some places grand fairs are set up.

Mahavira, the great teacher and the 24th Tirthankara of Jainism was contemporary of Lord Buddha. His mother Trisala or Priyakarinî had a series of miraculous dreams heralding the birth of Mahavira. Vardhama achieved enlightenement under an Ashoka tree after two and a half days fasting and mediation. Then he stripped himself of all his clothes and wore none thereafter, but Svetambras believe that Indra then presented him a white robe After his enlightenment he gave away all his wealth and possessions and owned nothing. Mahavira underlined the importance of austerity and complete non-violence as the essential means of spiritual evolution and salvation.

**Hanuman Jayanti**

On Chaitra Shukla Purnima, i.e., the full moon day of March-April Hanuman Jayanti is celebrated all over the country. The monkey-God Hanuman is worshipped everywhere in India either alsone or together with Lord Rama. Hanuman temples dot the entire length and breadth of the country. Every temple dedicated to Rama invariably has an idol of Hanuman. In other temples also Hanuman is found installed.

The birth anniversary of Hanuman, the son of the wind-god Marut end Anjana Devi, is celebrated with great religious fervour. People visit the Hanuman shrines, observe strict fast, offer prayers and puja, and read the Ramayana and the Hanuman Chalisa. On the occasion the idols of Hanuman is given a new coat of vermillion mixed with clarified butter and then richly decorated. Fairs are also held at some places near the shrines and charities done.

Hanuman is one of the greatest embodiments of strength, speed, agility, learning and selfless service to Lord Rama. He could fly at the speed of wind, uproot mountains and trees, assume any size and shape at will and make himself invisible. In the battlefield he was a terrifying figure, as colossus as a mountain, as tall as a tower and ever invincible. His face is red like ruby, his yellow skin and coat shines like molten gold and his mighty tail is of immense length. He shattered the enemies in the battlefield with his firece roar. He is immortal, and this immortality was granted to him by Rama to serve the devotees in distress. His great adventures have been described in great detact and with much reverence and delight in the Ramayana.

He is a living embodiment of Nishkam Karmayoga, love, sincerity and Ram-Nam, Rama and Hanuman are inseparable. His celibacy is of the highest order and he did things which were almost impossible for others for the sake of love of Lord Rama. On Hanuman Jayanti observe fast, meditate on him and his Lord Rama practice charity, read the Hanuman Chalisa and spend the day in repeating his glories and adventures and be blessed.

"We bow to Hanuman, who stand with his palms folded above his

forehead, with a flood of tears flowing down his cheeks wherever the Names of Lord are sung''.

**Chitrai Festival**

In Madurai a great festival celebrating the marriage of Lord Sundareswara with fish-eyed goddess Meenakshi, is held with great religious enthusiasm in the month of Chaitra (March-April). It lasts for 10 days and centres on the Meenakshi Temple, an extraordinary example of the Dravidian architecture. The deities are taken several times around the temple in chariots. Thousands of devotees from all over India collect here on this occasion. The wedding anniversary is known as Meenakshi-kalyanam, which is the most spectacular festival of Madurai.

The Meenakshi temple is said to have been founded originally by Indra himself. The legend goes that once Indra set out on a pilgrimage to expiate the misdeeds, he had done unawarely. During his pillgrimage when he came near Madurai he felt the burden of his misdeeds taken off and he found a Shiva Lingam there. He ascribed this miracle to this Lingam and immediately constructed a temple there and enshrined the lingam. Then, he desired to perform a puja and so the Lord Shiva himself caused the golden oltuses to appear in the nearby pool. Indra was mightily pleased and that day was Chaitra Purnima. The golden lotus lake is still there in the temple premises.

**Chaitra Parb**

Chaitra Parb is held on the full moon day of Chaitra month by the tribals in Orissa. It starts eight days preceding the Purnima. Throughout the celebrations the tribals observe fasting, and Indulge in danacing family attends it in new festive costumes. Animal sacrifice is one of the main features of the and hunting. The head of the family pays homage to his fore-fathers in the presence of the village priest called "Jani", and every member of the fastival. They start eating mangoes of the year only from this festival. Danda Nacha and Chaitighoda Nacha (two folk dance forms) are also performed on this occasion.

**Chaitra Purnima**

The full moon day of chaitra (March-April) is also observed as a sacred day to Chitra Gupta in South India. On this day Chitra Gupta, the assistant of Yamaraj, who keeps the accounts, is worshipped. It is Chitra Gupta who maintains the accounts, of our good and bad actions in this world, and we are rewarded or punished accordingly hereafter. At Kanchipuram, near Madras, the image of Chitra Gupta is taken out in a procession and the devotees have a holy dip in the River Chitra flowing down the nearby hills.

The worship and prayer offered to Chitra Gupta, the chief scribe of Yama, reminds us of the goods, high above, keeping a watch on our every action and maintaining a record of it. It helps us in self-analysis and maintaining a good conduct so as to reap good rewards and avoid punishment after death. It also reminds us that a sin can be forgiven if one repents sincerely, vows not to repeat it, and prays to the Lord with penitent heart devotion and intense faith. The deity is also invoked nametal or earthen pitcher filled with water, and is then offered worship and prayer with an elaborate ritual. Chitra Gupta literally means a "hidden picture" and it is he who presents a true picture of our actions after death.

**Akshya Tritiya**

Akshya Tritiya fast and festival is observed on the third day of the bright half of Vaisakha. "Akshya" literally means undecaying or exempt from decay. The piety and devotion done on this day never decay and secure permanency. This day is also believed to be the first day of the Satya-yuga.

On this day fast is observed and Vishnu along with his consort Lakhmi is worshipped with holy Ganga water, tulsi (basil) leaves, incense, flowers, lamps, new raiments and naivadya. The brahmins are given food grains and other food stuffs in charity.

Bathing in the holy Ganga, or in some other waters on this day is also considered of high religious merit. It is on this day that the portals of Sri Badrinarain, in the Himalayas, open after long snowy winter. Devotees worship Lord Badri on this day with food offerings, etc, in their houses and temples.

**Parshurama Jayanti**

Akshya Tritiya is also celebrated as Parshurama Jjyanti by worshipping and praying to him. Parshurama or Rama with Axe, destroyed the wicked and evil-minded Kshatriya kings and princes 21 times, including Shasrabahu (thousand armed) Haihaya King Aruna, who had forcibly taken away the holy cow of his father Jamdagani out of arrogance. Tapas was his only wealth. He is also a great example of filial obedience, austerity, power and brahmanic ideals.

He was sixth incarnation of Vishnu and became manifest in the world in the beginning of the Treta Yuga mainly to terminate the tyranny of certain Kshatriya kings. His story has been told in the Mahabharata and the Puranas. He also appears in the Ramayana, as an adversary of Ramchandra, and challenges Ramchandra to a trial of strength, but finally he recognises Ramachandra's superiority and pays him homage, and retires to the Himalayas. The Malabar region on the Western Ghat, is believed to have been founded by him.

On this sacred day fasting, austerities, prayer and worship of Lord Vishnu are common highlights.

**Shankaracharya Jayanti**

The birth anniversary of Adi Shankaracharya is celebrated on the fifth of the bright half of Vaisakha in the South, but in north India it is on the tenth. He has been one of the greatest saint philosophers of India, and also symbolizes India's cultural and emotional integrity and unity.

His coming was a great boon and blessing to millions of Hindu souls, who were then grouping in the darkness of ignorance and religious decay and disintegration. He is believed to be the incarnation of Shiva himself. He revived Brahmanism and took Vedanta philosophy to a new height. He is believed to have lived between A.D. 788 and 820, but according to tradition he flourished in 200 B.C. and was a native of Malabar, in Kerala. He worked many miracles and died at an early age of thirty-two. He is the reputed author of many original philosophical works and

commentaries on the Upnishdas, Vedanta Sutras and the Bhagvadita. He has rightly been designated as our "Vedanta Guru" His philosophy is equally accessible both to the learned and the layman. He composed many beautiful hymns, and wanted people to devote themselves to God in any of his forms and incarnations.

Shankaracharya Jayanti is a fit occasion to study his works, to fast to meditate and to rededicate ourselves to the service of the Lord and the country. His blessings in the form of his teachings are always with us.

**Janaki Navami**

The Janaki Navami fast is observed on the ninth day of the bright half of Vaisakha, as she is supposed to have sprung on this day from a furrow, while King Janaka was ploughing the field. Sita means a furrow. Janaka took her up and brought up as her own child. She was is also called "A-Yonifa", not born from the womb. She was actually Sri or goddess Lakshmi in human form, incarnated in the world for bringing about the destruction of Ravana and other demons. She reflects the best ideals of the Indian woman. As an embodiment of self-sacrifice, purity, tenderness, fidelity, conjugal affection and other conceivable female virtues, Sita is par excellence.

Some people believe that Sitaji appeared in the field of Janaka on the eighth day of the black half of Phalgun, and so they celebrate it on that day. However, observance of fast and offering of prayers and worship to mother Janaki on this auspicious day bestow upon the aspirants conjugal happiness, marital bliss and worldly prosperity.

**Baisakhi**

Baisakhi festival derives its name from the month of Vaisakha (April-May) in which this day occurs. It invaribaly falls on the thirteenth of April every year. On this day people bathe in the sacred tanks, rivers, pools and on wells early in the morning, dress themselves in festive clothes, and visit shrines, temples and gurudwaras to offer prayers and worship.

It is a north Indian festival, but it is observed in Punjab with special enthusiasm and fervour. The people of Punjab perform bhangra dances, sing folk songs to the tune of rolling drums. exchange greetings, enjoy feasts and such other marry makings with gay abundance.

This also marks the beginning of a month long Vaiskakha bathing. The pillgrimage to the only shrine of Badrinath, in the Himalayas, also commences from this day. The charities done during Vaisakha month are believed to earn great religious merit, and so people generously give money, grains and other things to the poor and needy and the brahmins, and observe fast, chant the glories of the Loord and practice such other pious activities.

**Narsimha Jayanti**

Vishnu incarnated himself in the Narsimha or Man-Lion form on the fourteenth day of the bright half of Vaisakha. He did so to free the world and his devotees from the depredations of the demon king Hiranyakasipu, who like his brother Hiranyaksh had got a boon of immunity from Brahma. He forbade prayer and worship to Lord Hari and substituted worship and prayer to himself. He was very much annoyed to discover his own son Prahlad as an ardent devotee of Vishnu. He tortured and tormented Prahlad to change his mind, but child Prahlad remained unmoved in his devotion to God. His father tried to kill Prahlad by trampling him under the elephants, by throwing him down the precipices, and by such other means but without any success.

One day Hiranyakasipu was so enraged that he rushed to kill Prahlad with his own sword, asking the child where was his saviour? Instantly Vishnu stepped out of a nearby pillar in the from of Narsimha, half lion, half man and tore Hiranyakasipu to pieces.

People fast on this auspicious day, meditate on Narsimha and seek his grace to have the devotion like that of Prahlad. In charity people give cows, grains, gold, robes, etc, to the poor and the brahmins according to their capacity. Narsimha symbolises omnipresence of God, hid deep concern and love for the devotees, and also the victory of the good over the evil.

**Buddha Purnima**

Bhagwan Buddha was born at Lumbini near Nepal attained enlightenment at Uruvela, near Bodh Gaya, in Bihar and finally moksha at Kusinagar, in the country of Mallas, now in Uttar Pradesh on the very same day, i.e., Vaisakh Purnima (the full moon day of Vaisakha; April-May). The association of the same day with three great events of Buddha's life has made it the most important festival in the Buddhist world. It is celebrated all over the world with immense piety, devotion and fervour. Special celebrations are held at places like Sarnath, Sanchi, Kusinagar and Bodh Gaya. In the Deer Park at Sarnath. Near Varanasi, he for the first time preached and turned the Wheel of Dharma. At Sanchi some of his ascred remains are enshrined under a magnificent stupa. Buddha images and portraits are taken out in a procession, on this day. Devotees of Buddha recite and read their sacred scriptures, observe fast, worship Buddha at home and in temples, and practice charity.

We find that Buddha's teachings are more relevant today than they were ever before. He preached that this world is full of sorrows because of our attachment to things. Our sufferings are direct result of our desires. This results into reincarnations and a ceaseless chain of rebirths, suffering, sickness old age and death, he said. Extinction of desire and attachment is essential for salvation, and the only way is to follow the Eight-fold Path : Right Belief, Right Intention, Right Word, Right Conduct, Right Living, Right Efforts, Right Thinking and Right Meditation. He underlined the importance of striking a balance between indulgence and asceticism, and it is what most of the people badly need today.

**Chandan Yatra**

The summer festival of Lord Jagannath is celebrated with much religious zeal and passion at Puri in Orissa. The Chandan Yatra of Jagannath begins on Akshya Tritiya (the third day of bright half of Vaisakha) falling in April-May and continues for 21 days. Everyday the reptesentative images of the deities are taken out in grand procession to nearby tanks where they are rowed in profusely decorated boats to the accompaniment of music and dance. On the last day of the celebrations Bhauni Yatra is performed. This festival

is also celebrated at Bhubaneshwar, Baripada and Balanga.

**Pooram**

The Pooram celebration in Vaisakha is a major festival at Trichur. It is an annual important event. A great parade of thirty richly caprisoned elephants carrying ceremonial umbrellas is held on this occasion. They pass through the magnificent temple entrance-tower and line up in the open ground. On the elephant in the centre rides the temple deity Vadakkanathan (Shiva). To the music of the pipes and trumpets the elephants go round the shrine, and at night a spectacular display of fireworks is there, which goes on till dawn.

**Folk And Tribal Danes of Peninsular South Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu & Kerala**

The vast land sprawling southwards beyond the Vindhyas almost along the Tropic of Cancer and tapering into the Indian Ocean between the Bay of Bengal on the east and the Arabian Sea in the west, is the Peninsular South or more popularly known as the Deccan. It comprises the plateaux, hills, valleys, forest clad spurs, coastal plains, etc. The rivers Narmada and Tapti flow parallel to each other, the former from Maikal-Mahadeo hills and the latter from the Satpura ranges. A very vast stretch of plateau from the Satmala Ajanta Ranges to the Nilgiris in the South cover a greater part of the Peninsular South. Almost in the extreme south are the Anamalai hills. In the Nilgiri hills converge the two ghats.

The Sahyadri Ranges, popularly known as the Western Ghats, dominate the whole of eastern Peninsular India. The mighty rivers of the Deccan like Godawari and Krishna irrigate the states of Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh before pouring into the Bay of Bengal. Karnataka, consisting of the parts of peninsular plateau, the Western Ghats and the coastal plains, is drained by the rivers Kaveri, Krishna and Tunbhadra. The Andhra part of the high Deccan plateau gently slopes down to the coastal east. Here its main rivers Krishna and Godawari rush to merge into the Bay of Bengal in their wide deltas. Tamil Nadu, flanked in the east by the caoastal plains of the Bay of Bengal, is characterized by such topographical features as long sunny beaches, forest-clad hills,

large lagoons, deltaic mouths of the rivers and varied flore and fauna. Kerala, lying round cape Comarin, is a strip of land embraced by the Arabian Sea down her full stretch in the east. It is characterised by coastal low lying fertile tracts, back waters and beautiful scenery.

Ethnically the people of South India present a miscellany of different types of races and communities. Obviously, they are the product of a variety of strains and strands including the Austroloid, Arminoid and Nordic. The South Indian language- complex consists of Marathi, the Dravidian-Tamil, Telegu, Kannada and Malyalam and some other minor dialects of the various tribals and aboriginals.

**Maharashtra**

Maharashtra forms the part of the Peninsular India. It derives its name from Maharashtri, a form of Prakrit language which was in vogue in ancient days, and from the people called Maharashtrikas who had settled there in pre-historic days. Maharashtra is inhabited by many tribes like the Bhils, the Agris, the Kolis, the Kataharis, the Kunabis, the Gonds, etc. Many of these tribes are common to Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Karnataka. By profession they are cultivators, agriculturists, cattle-breeders, herdsmen, hunters, nomads and craftsmen. Then there are many communities who are professional bhands, musicians, dancers and wandering performers. Dances are part and parcel of their life. Their fairs, festivals, rituals and ceremonies are a fit occasion for singing and dancing.

The *Lezim* dance, a male performance, combines beautifully physical exercise and dancing. Done with a *Lezim* or a small mallet, it is a fascinating dance performed in the formation of a circle, in twos or fours. The accompanying instruments are the drums. It involves a lot of stepping, hopping, bending, squatting, etc. to the perfect timing of the strikes of the Lezim. A large group of boys and girls doing *Lezim* dance presents a beautiful sight while the *Lezims* strike rhythmically in perfect unison. Now-a-days *Lezim* dances are performed as a part of physical drill and exercise in schools and colleges of Maharashtra.

The *Tipri* and *Goph* dances are performed with the small coloured sticks, called the Tipris, held by each of the dancers. The dancers form pairs and first strike their own tipris and then with those of the others, in various fascinating patterns and styles making many complex formations. The *Tipri* dance reminds us of the *Garba* and *Dandiya* dances of Gujarat. In the *Goph* dance, the dancers hold *tipris* in one hand and coloured strings in the other. The strings are tied to one central point over their heads. The dancers move in uniform and well defined steps to weave a braid of the strings and then unweave it by dancing in reverse steps.

The Tarapi dance is named after the musical instrument used in it. A Tarapi is a bagpipe type of instrument. The dance has many varieties and can be performed in semi-circle or a line. It involves many types of foot-works and movements and hopping.

The Dahi Handi (curd-pot) dance imitates the so well-known prank of stealing curd from the Krishna legend. It is a popular Maharashtrian folk-form in which young men and boys go around in a procession dancing in simple steps and then form a pyramid, younger boys standing on the shoulders of the older' and stronger ones. The boy on the top of the pyramid enacts the reaching to the hanging pot of the curd. It is full of gay abandon and youthul innocent mischiefs. The accompanying instruments are cymbals and a drum. The dancers wear anklebells and sing songs.

The Dindi dance is another Maharashtrian folk-form associated with Krishna. It is performed by males on Ekadashi day of Ashad (August) or Kartika. It is characterized by dancing in a mandala or a circle preceded by falling into two rows facing each other. It resembles Rasa variety of dance in vogue in many regions of the country. Mridanga, cymbals, and tambori are the accompanying instruments. The musicians lead the dance and sing devotional songs followed by a song in chorus by the dancers.

The Dashavatara or Bohada dance is actually a popular folk ballet. It is performed on an improvised stage in which the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu in particular, and other mythological episodes from the Puranas are enacted. The dance-drama begins with invocation to and worship of Lord Ganesha, the Elephant-

headed god, the remover of the obstacles. Then a man wearing a heavy mask of Ganesha appears on the stage. The Sutradhara or the Manager of the stage announces the appearance of the various actors on the stage, fills the gaps by his comments and also acts as a chorus. Obviously, this is the most elaborate and developed folk-ballet of Maharashtra. The drum, cymbals, a tuntune (a string instrument), daph are the main accompanying instruments.

The Tamasha is another popular operatic folk dance form of Maharashtra. This theatrical form is a sort of synthesis of many folk theatrical and dance forms of the region. It was about two centuries from the present day that various folk-forms culminated into Tamasha.

Performed both by men and women together, the Tamasha has the farcical bent. It involves a great deal of singing, narration in ballad form and mime punctuated with frequent dances. Satirical in tone, flexible in nature, its range of appeal and form is much more sophisticated, the rural form is still based on the folk- tales. The manager of the Tamasha is known as Phadkari. The play begins with invocational songs to Ganesha and Saraswati followed by a dance accompanied by the singing of Lavani songs. The Tamasha in its total effect and enacting is like the Bhavai of Gujarat, the Jatra of West Bengal and the Nautanki of Uttar Pradesh.

The Kolis of Maharashtra, the fishing folks, have their own typical dance-forms. They perform their Koli dances either with their womenfolk or alone in two rows facing each other. They hold small oars in their hands and move them to the rhythm of a song. Their swaying backwards and forwards create a scene of a boat tossing on the sea-waves. The Koli dance takes different shapes and styles according to the different parts of the region.

**Karnataka**

Karnataka, consisting of the parts of the peninsular plateau, the Western Ghats and the coastal plains, is drained by the Rivers Kaveri, Krishna and Tungbhadra and their tributaries. Its chequered and tumultuous history is like a mosaic of kings and their kingdoms, interwoven with time-honoured traditions, rituals,

customs and dances, culturally, it can proudly boast of a synthesis of Dravidian, Aryan and Muslim cultures, scenic marvel, splendid past and no less significant persent. Geologically, Karnataka has been one of the world's most ancient formations and people and races have been living here over all these millenniums.

Ethnically, the land presents a picture of varied tribes and races. Some of these are common to the adjoining states Andhra, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. They comprise Maratis, Meras, Kotas, Koyas, Pardis, Paniyans and a few others. Then there are many professional communities of dancers, musicians, stage-players, jugglers, sanke-charmers, musicians, etc. Kannada is the predominant language but Marathi and a few forms of Tamil are also in vogue. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Mohmmednism have all been here in peaceful co-existence. The various folk-forms of Karanataka have been conditioned by its geological and geographical conditions, its tribes and racial groups and historical developments all these ages.

The *Yakshagana* is one of the popular folk dance-dramas of Karnataka. It can be called a semi-classical dance-drama as it contains a good number of classical and literary elements besides those of many folk and tribal ones. It is performed in the open rice-fields after the summer harvesting. On the one hand it bears close affinity with traditional Sanskrit theatre and on the other intimate closeness with *Bhagavata Melas* of Tamil Nadu, *Kathakali* of Kerala and Veedhinatakamu of Andhra.

The themes of *Yakshagana* are from the *Puranas*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana.* It is known by different names in different part of the state. The story, in about two-three hundred stanzas, is set to music and recited by the Bhagavatha, the stage-manager of the *Sutradhar* at the time of enactment of the play. He is the man who runs the entire show and is responsible for its success. Without his consent nothing can move or happen. The dialogues are improvised and based on the recitation of the Bhagavatha. The female roles are performed by the male actors. The *Yakshagana* dances highlight the primitive human emotions and passions and therefore, fury and terror are predominenly presented through the scenes of fights,

battles and bloody events. The actors dance and mime to the song of the *Bhagavatha* and the music of the drums chande and maddle. The dance is mostly of Tandva variety punctuated with Lasya type.

The costume plays an important part in the staging of Yakshagana. The actors put on traditional costumes and facial make-ups which are at once colourful, fascinating, grostesque and frightening. Different characters have different types of costumes, make-ups and head-gears. The performance lasts throughout the night. The actors undergo a long and arduous training and discipline in dancing, diction and scriptural lore and learning before they appear on the stage in public. Basically, it is a religious and devotional form of dance-drama enriched and improved upon its folk-form and brought to semi-classical standard by introduction of literary and classical modes of mime, music and dancing as decribed in the *Natyashastra* of Bharat Muni.

Among the Tulus of South Karnataka and Mysore there are many tribal dances known by the generic name of Devil dances. In these dances the various spirits called the Bhootas are invoked and their blessings sought for peace, prosperity and harmonius community living. As the dance nears the climax, the dancer falls into a trance and the spirit invoked enters into him to guide, encourage or warn the Tulu-folk. The entire region is dotted with the small shrines of these spirits. Annual and seasonal festivals and dance sessions are held to propitiate them. The dancers who get possessed of the Spirits speak to the assembled folk and tell them their weaknesses and strengths and point out the future course of action during crisis and times of peace. The Bhoota dance may take many shapes and forms. The dancers put on elaborate facial make-ups and ceremonial costumes and perform during night to the accompaniment of loud drumming, singing and playing of the pipes. In between there are narrations, dialogues and recitations. A dance of this variety is performed to propitiate the serpent deity called Subha Raya. Complicated serpent patterns and designs are drawn before the shrine in various colours, and then a dance is performed in which many intricate choreographical patterns are presented by the dancer to the loud beat of drums and music of pipes. The dancer finally falls into a trance. Symbolising the union

of the worshipped and the worshipper.

Among the Marati tribesmen there are prevalent many martial and hunting dances characterized by hopes, jumps, vigour and simple footwork in a circle, round a drummer in the centre, or two rows facing each other. They have dances confined only to men or women only and also mixed dances. Then there are harvest dances. For exampie, the Unmathata is a harvest dance done both by men and women-folk. They dance together in gay abandon during harvest season, women holding sickles in their hands and men holding hammers to the accompaniment of songs.

The Kamsale dance is a religious one and takes its name after the big cymbals called kamsale. The devotees approach the shrine of the god in the hills in a procession dancing to the playing of these big and resounding cymbals and singing of songs in praise of the deity. Acrobatic postures virility, complicated footwork coupled with loud clash of the large cymbals reaching a cresendo are the highlights of this dance. In its vigour, virility and supple footwork, it has a touch of martial dance.

The Hattari dance is done during harvesting season among the Kodvas of Coorg in Mysore. The menfolk collect in the open field and indulge in a graceful dance attired in traditional black tunics, white trousers and turbans and sash-cards tied around their waists. They form a large ring and dance round and round with shields and canes in their hands. The accompanying instruments include drums and pipes. They sing and engage in mock fights with forceful footwork now raising left foot and balancing on the right, now jump vigorously in Tandava style.

The Dodava tribe perform a very lively dance at harvest time known as Balakat. The dancers sway and swing their bodies rhythmically and execute some virile jumping and kecking in the air with their legs and feet. The dancers hold fly-whisks in their hands. Obviously, the dance is named after the flywhisk called the Balakat.

The ritual dances of Karnataka include a variety of dances called Kargam dances which have a close affinity with those of Tamil

Nadu. The dummy horse dance is also a popular folk-form and is similar to one in vogue in tamil Nadu. Besides there are dances of other animals and birds in which a dummy of that particular creature is worn and its gait is initiated and danced ritually to a great delight of the spectators. Then there is a variety of *Kolata* dances performed to the spectators. Then there is a variety of Kolata dances performed to the accompaniment of songs, striking of sticks and clapping of hands.

**Andhra Pradesh**

Andhra Pradesh is a large strip of Deccan Plateau bounded by the Bay of Bengal and the Ghats in the east, by Karnataka in the west, Tamil Nadu in the south and in the north by Maharshtra, Mahdya Pradesh and Orissa. This part of the high Deccan Plateau gently slopes down to the coastal east. Andhra's recorded history goes back to the times of Emperor Ashoka. Under the mighty Satavahana kings the Buddhist art and architecture attained great heights which is preserved to this day in the form of famous cave temples, stupas, etc.

Inhabited by many large tribal population Andhra Pradesh presents a rich wealth of traditional folk and tribal dances. The Banjaras, the Gonds, the Sarvas, the Bagatas, the Mandulas, the Yendis, the Chenchus, the Gdabas and Mathuris are the well known tribes of the State. Professionally they are food-gatherers, hunters, small farmers and nomads. Then there are many professional communities and castes of performers. Their dances are conditioned by their occupations, ecology, life-tyle and their religious beliefs.

The *Bathakomma* is an exclusively female folk-dance of Telangana region. Women, specially newly-married women, perform it with a great feeling for the peace and success of their married life. A story connected with the dance tells us that a Rajput king had a beautful daughter named Saijanbai. She was sent back by her in- laws to her father's house after marriage because she could not perform the household duties. The women-folk of *Porja* tribe also have an exclusive dance which they perform in a long winding line for the good of their married domestic life. The Gobbi is also such another

folkdance.

The *Mathuri* dances belong to the tribal folk of the same name. These dances are done during the rainy month of Shravana by the Mathuris living in Adilabad district of the State. It is a mixed dance in which men and women participate together, women forming the inner circle and men the outer semi-circle. The dancers sing devotional and secular songs and dance. The men strike the small sticks and the women clap to mark the time. The Mathuri dances have a close resemblance to Rasa-lila of Uttar Pradesh. It is believed that the Mathuri tribe actually came from Mathura and therefore, are named so.

The Siddis or Hyderabad region have their own typical dances. They actually belonged to Africal and were brought here by the Hindu kings in the middle of the twelfth century to perform guard duties in the palaces. They were then fovourite with the ruling classes as soldiers, sailors and personal body-guards. As they were in great demand, they were brought Africa and Abyssinia as slaves. Gradually they were absorbed into the Indian social life, but their dances still have the flavour of their land of origin in their ferocity, virility and warlike movements. A mimetic martial dance called Dhamal is performed by them with swords and shields in their hands specially on the occasion of marriage. Their dances present a fascinating spectacle of rhythmic movement and colours in their exotic colourful costumes.

The Gonds of the hilly region of northern Hyderabad district perform a stick dance known as the Dandaria dance. The group of male dancers, dressed in their colourful best, visit in a dancing procession the nearby villages where they are cordially welcomed by the hosts. The guests and the hosts dance together anti-clock wise to the accompaniment of drums and trumpets and striking of sticks held in their hands. The musicians lead the procession. It exclusively a male performance and the young men and boys participate in it dressed as women and girls. A Gond legend would have us believe that an ancient Gond hero Dandaria, a descendant of the Pandava prince was the original creator of this dance. The Gonds proudly believe themselves to the descendants of the

Pandavas.

The Banjaras or the Lambdis are the gipsy tribals of Hyderabad and Telangana in Andhra Pradesh. They are believed to have been migrated from Rajasthan. Originally cowherds and nomads, now they are cultivators and farmers. They are excellent dancers and musicians and wear very exotic colourful costumes. They are also found in Gujarat. The Banjara women perform many dances on festive and auspicious occasions with water pots delicately balanced on their heads. They execute simple but graceful and small foot movements in a big circle round and the clinking of their bracelets, etc. Sometimes they dance in a single file or double line, and make supple hand movements and gestures imitating their household tasks and daily routines. They depict through their synchronised rhythmic small and simple dance steps and hand gestures the activities of sowing, planting, harvesting or a journey to the village will to fetch water.

The Dappu Vadhyam is another popular folk dance of the ribal people of Andhra Pradesh. It is exclusively a male per formance. The dancers carry a drum each and beat it with sticks while dancing. It is called the Dappu Vadhyam dance because of the round-shaped drums called dappu are carried by the dancers. The dance is marked with rapid and rhythmic forward and backward movements of the feet and crouching of the body. The dance has many varieties which differ from occasion to occasion and festival to festival. Only men do it at the time of marriage, Holi, Dussehra or on any other such auspicious and festive occasion.

**Tamil Nadu**

Tamil Nadu takes its name after the ancient language spoken here. Tamil is one of the oldest living languages of India and the world. In the south-eastern extremity of Indian peninsula, Tamil Nadu is bounded in the east by the coastal plains of the Bay of Bengal and Kerala in the west, and by Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka in the north. Kaveri is the main river that drains the land before it poures into the Bay of Bengal with its wide delta: The ancient Indian art and architecture in its purest form can be found here. Its rich cultural heritage is well preserved in its ornate temples, classical

Bharat Natyam, traditional Karnatic music and folk and tribal dances. Tamil Nadu's recorded history dates back to the early centuries of the Christian Era. The Pallavas of Kanchi (550-912 A.D.), the Cholas of Tanjore (850-129 A.D.) and the Pandyas of Madurai (1150-1350 A.D.) were three ancient and almost contemporary royal dynasties which ruled over different parts of Tamil Nadu.

Some of the oldest Indian tribes comprising of the *Todas*, the Badagas, the Kotas, the Irulars, the Adiyans, etc. live in Tamil Nadu. They have their respective ceremonial, hunting, harvesting, social and ritualistic dances. By occupation they are cultivators, agriculturists, hunters, nomads, food-gatherers cattlebreeders, fishermen and craftsmen. Besides there are many professional communities of the singers, dancers and performers. They are scattered all over the State in hills, plains, forests and coastal regions.

Tamil Nadu has a number of folk and tribal dances. The Kummi is one of the popular folk dances of the State. It is enjoyed equally by the women folk both in cities and villages. The women and young girld make a circle and dance with slow, mincing but varyoing steps to the accompaniment of clapping and singing punctuated with pirouettes and hopes. The Kummi dances have several variations according to the social and ceremonial occasion and the community of the dancers. In its gaiety, social function, and ritual aspect, the Kummi reminds of the Ghumar of Rajasthan, the Garba of Gujarat and the Rasa of Uttar Pradesh. The dancers execute many choreographical floor designs and patterns through collective footwork and movements. These intricate designs are also traced out on the floor with coloured rice-flour and paste as things of decoration and auspiciousness. The Kolattam is a variation of the Kumi in which the dancers strike short sticks held in their hands instead of clapping or weave and unweave a braid of the many colourful ribbons or strings tied overhead to a central point. The latter is called Pinnal Kolaattam. These dances require a lot of skill, precision, practice and perseverance on the part of the dancers for even a slightest wrong movement can totally spoil the sport and the weaving of the braid.

Another popular folk-form is the dummy horse dance known as Puravi Attam. The dummy horse dance is common to other states such as Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. It is done on social and festive occasions by a troup of professional dancers. They put on dummy horses round their waists made of basket, cloth, bamboo, paper, etc. which create the impression of the horse-riders. They perform it to the lilting music of pipes, drums and cymbals. It involves a lot of practice, training and discipline on the part of performers. They walk and dance on stilts which remain unseen being covered with the flowing frills and the frame of the dummy horses. The Puravi Attams are obviously very colourful, entertaining and picture resque performances. Through these dances the artists-depict the full. length episodes from the Puranas and other Hindu scriptures. These shows last for hours at strength As a pure diversion andenteriainment the dummy horse dance has a few parallels.

The Todas are the one of the most ancient tribals of India. They are found in Ootacammund (Ooty for short) and the Nilgiri Hills of the State. In recent years there have been much research and speculation in regard to their origin, culture, etc. Toda is a name derived after a tree "tudr", held most sacred by them. Their songs and dances have been conditioned by their peculiar life-style and environs. They are great lovers of music and dance. The Toda songs, generally sung in a chorus, are like the buzzing of the swarm of bees coming from a distance floating on the air over the hills and valleys which gets louder and louder as it comes near.

They are buffalo breeders. Their buffaloes along with their huts are most characterstic of the Todas. They dance on various occasions including on funeral times. Menfolk dance in groups holding hands and forming a ring. While they dance with slow steps, they bend back wards and forwards. The Todas are Hindus by faith and have many deities but chief among them are Mother goddess and her brother On. The former rules over the earth and the living, the latter over the world of the dead. On several occasions in the year they perform ritual worship and offer prayers, and dancing forms an integral part of these religious ceremonies.

**Kerala**

Round the Cape Comarin, just right down in the south of peninsular India, lies Kerala. It is a strip of land embraced by the Arabian Sea down her full stretch. It is a tropical land, fertile and fruitful and drained by many swift flowing rivers and streams. Kerala is characterised by rich green of the paddy fields, coconut palms, luxuriant forests, coffee and rubber gongs. The dancer wears a mask make up, elaborate headgear and many sparling oranaments. In between the recitation of the story and singing of the songs the dancer interprets the theme through gestures, facial *abhinaya* and attractive and forceful dancing before a large gathering of intelligent and appreciative people. He dances in frenzy as if possessed by the spirit of the deity invoked in thebegining. The themes represented and interpreted are from the Hindu mythology and the Puranas. It is a spectacular community performance done ritually by a single performer in the courtyard of the shrines.

*Koithu Nirtham* is a simple but lovely harvest dance popular among the peasants and agricultural labourers. It is a mixed dance in which men and women dance together either holding each other by the arms or standing shoulder to shoulder. The accompanying orchestral ensamble includes drums, pipes and other wind instruments. It may also be enjoyed during marriages. The dancers swaying and singing in unison to the tune of instrumental music present a fascinating sight.

These rustic folk enjoy another dance form known as Cherumar Kali. It is also a harvest dance but more virile, robust and with many elements of a martial dance. it is performed with small sticks held in hands. There are many other Kali dances performed and enjoyed at various festive occasions. For example, the Nayars perform the martial dance called Velakali. Eitualistic in essence, it is done in the month of Phalgun (March-April) in front of the shrines of Padmanabhawami in which the mythological battle of the Mahabharata is enacted to the accompaniment of drums and trumpets. In between the war-cries, the forceful foot- work, jumps, pirouettes and the mockfight with swords and shields accentuate

the total virile effect.

The Poorakali, the Pulayarkali, the Kaikottikali, the Kolkali are some other popular Kali dances. The Poorakali is popular among depressed class and the Harijans. The dancers stand in a circle, clap to mark time, sing and dance in simple, measured and dignified steps. The Pulayarkali resembles Velakali in plantations and many colourful festivals, the magnificent Kathakali and the lyrical Mohniattam dances besides many tribal and folk-forms. Ethnically, Kerala presents a tapestry of a variety of tribes which include the Irulars, the Palliyars, the Paniyars, the Kadaras, the Kalandis, etc. Dancing is practised and relished by all the communities, castes and sub-castes alike. They are matchless dancers and singers and turn any possible occasion and festivity into a session ofsongs and dances. They do ritual dances to propitiate various gods and goddesses, celebrate harvest time with dances, indulge in martial and hunting dances, perform magic and mysterious dances to the accompaniment of haunting vocal and instrumental music.

Mudiettu, a ritual dance, is one of the oldest dances of Kerala. It is preceded by a drawing of a figure of Bhadrakali in front of a mandap set up specially for the purpose. The gigure of Bhadrakali is offered puja with waving of lamps, beating of the drums and oblations. Then her spirit is invoked to bless the performance. Gradually the elaborate figure of Kali is wiped out and the dance-drama begins with the beating of drums and sounding of the conches. As the performance progresses the orchestral music rises to a crescendo. The actors appear on the stage and enact the killing of demon Daruka by Kali to the accompaniment of defeaning drumming and recitation of the mythological tale. Ultimately Daruka is vanquished and Kali wins but not before a fierce battle is fought. Mudiettu is a fascinating dance-drama involving recitation, singing, dancing and dialogues. The mask like heavy make-ups of various characters amidst burning torches and defeaning music further strenghen the bizarre and magical elements of the play. The entire show involves a lot of fierce, furious and tandava type of dancing by Daruka and Kali for hours together all around the whole arena. Obviously, Mudiettu can be called an immediate precursor of more elaborate and developed classical Kathakali.

Kolam Thullal is another popular ritual dance which is quite close to Mudiettu and classical Kathakali in many respects. It is a kind of pantomime dance performed to the singing and recitation of the story and loud music of drums, cymbals and technique, but again it is form of low caste peasants, labourers and workers. The Koikottikali is a very popular dance among the women-folk. The participant women make a ring round a lighted lamp and perform the dance with simple steps, sing songs and clap to mark time.

The Moplah community menfolk have their Kalkali. The dancers hold small sticks in their hands and strike them rhythmically. The leader leads by singing followed by its repetition by the rest of the dancers in a chorus. The songs pertain to romance, love harvesting and sea life, and reflect the pure joy of living and working. In its toot-work and movements, it entails clear, swift and well defined steps. The Moplah tolk perform and enjoy another dance called Thappumelakali because of the accompanying musical instrument called Thappu. Comparatively it is more virile and forceful and is marked with swift foot-movements, jumps, crouching and such other positions. It requires more skill, vigour and preciseness on the part of the performers than other Kali dances do.

Thairai Attam or Teyyam is another popular religious and ritual dance like the Mediettu in which a fierce fight between good and evil and the ultimate victory of good is shown. It is a colourful dance characterised by heavy make-ups, high headgear, fierceness and swaying and swinging sinuously in perfect rhythm to the beating of Chenda. The drum beating is very loud which gradually reaches a cresendo. The dancer is believed to be possessed by the spirit of the deity before whose shrine it is performed. He dances himself to a frenzy and to a trance finally when his body is said to have been transformed into that of the deity. The story is only narrated or recited but not interpreted by the dancer. This difference is the main dividing line between Teyyam and Mediettu. Not unlike the Mediettu, it also a one man show lasting the whole night. It is held annually in the temple courtyards just after harvesting.

# G

**Gaganaganja** (*treasury of ehter*)

God. Buddhist. One of a group of *bodhisattvas* (buddha-designates). Colour: yellow, red or gold. Attributes: blue lotus, book, jewel, lotus and wishing tree in a vase.

**Gajavahana**

God. Hindu-Dravidian (Tamil). A form of Skanda who has an elephant as a vehicle. Mainly from southern India. Attributes: cockerel and spear.

**Gal Bapsi** ('hook' god)

Local god. Hindu-Dravidian (Tamil) Louthern India]. Worshipped partcularly by the Bhils. To exoiate sns, the penitent thrusts a hook intoits back and is suspended from it on the day when the sun enters Aries.

**Ganapati** (*lord of hosts*)

1. God. Hindu (Puranic). The more commonly recognized name of the elephant god Ganesa, particularly favoured in western India.

2. God. Buddhist (Mahayana). The name of a deity influenced by the Hindu god Ganesa. Depicted riding upon a rat or mouse and carrying an assortment of attributes.

**Ganapatihrdaya** (*the heart of Ganapati*)

Minor goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). The Sakti of Ganapati.

**Gandha** (*odour*)

Goddess. Buddhist-Lamaist (Tibet). In Lamaism one of the group of *mataras* (mothers). Colour: green. Attribute: conch with sandalood resin.

**Gandhari** (*of Ghandhara*)

Gandhri of learning. Jain (India]. One of sixteen *asanadevatas* headed by the goddess Sarasvati. May also be a *vidyadevi.*

**Gandha Tara** (*fragrance Tara*)

Minor goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana).

Colour: red. Attribute: conch with sandalwood resin.

**Ganesh** (*lord of hosts*)

*Origin* Hindu (Epic and Puranic) [India]. God of widom and prudence.

*Known period ofworship* circa 400 AD onwards until present.

*Synonyms* Ganapati.

*Centre (s) of cult* none specific.

Art reference sculptures generally bronze but also stone. Reliefs.

*Literary sources* late Mahabharata recensions and *Brihaddharma Purana* etc.

Ganesh is god of wisdom and art, a benign deity generally assumed to offer help when invoked to overcome difficulties. He may have originated as a fertility god and as a *yaksa* (local forest deity). His father is Siva. His mother, Parvati, is said to have created him from the scurf of her skin. He is depicted in human form with an elephant's head (or, less frequent, up to five heads) and a trunk (which removes obstacles), sometimes bearing one tusk, on a stout or obese body (which contains the unierse). He has four arms which can carry a large number of attributes but particularly a shell, a discus, a mace and a water-lily. His sacred animal is the banicoot. He is called upon before going on a journey, moving house or opening a new business.

According to one legend his elephant head was gained after his mother had put him outside the house to guard the doorstep while she took a bath. He barred the way to his father whereupon Siva inadvertntly decapitated him. His mother vowed to secure a head for him from the first passing creature, which happened to be an elephant. Another account suggests that Parvati took Ganesh to show him off to the gods but that Sani (Saturn) burned his head to ashes and the elephant's head was provided to save his life by a compassionate Visnu.

Ganesh's great popularity results in frequent appearance in temples devoted to other Hindu deities. Sculptures are sometimes painted red. He is also a common household guardian made popular by his gentle nature.

Ganesh, commonly known and easily recognised as the Elephant-God, is one of the most popular deities of the Hindu pantheon. Before every undertaking—be it laying of the foundation of a house, or opening of a shop or beginning any other work, blessings of Lord Ganesh are invoked by worshipping him first.

Ganesh has many names. The main ones are Ganapati (lord of the tribe or attendants), Vighnesvara (controller of all obstacles), Vinayak (the prominent leader), Gajanana (elephant-faced), Gajadhipati (Lord of elephants), Lambkarn (long-eared), Lambodar (pendant-bellied) and Ekadant (having one tusk).

Ganesh is the son of Lord Shiv and goddess Parvati (Shiva'consorty). The story connected with his birth and having an elephant's head is an interesting episode of Hindu mythology. On one occasion when Parvati was going to take her bath, she, for reasons of privacy and protection, created ganesh from her sweat and scurf and asked him to keep guard at her apartments. Shiv, returning after his journey, sought admission in the house. Ganesh, unware of his identity refused the entry. Shiv was enraged and he cut off Ganesh's head. Hearing the scuffle Parvati appeared and tearfully explained that the victim was their offspring.

On hearing the sad news Shiv ordered his attendants to look around and bring back the head of a child whose mother might be sleeping

with her back to wards it. Only one she elephant was found sleeping in this poture and thus the severed head of the cub-elephant was brought to Shiv. Shiv fixed this head onto his son's shoulders.

Another legend accounting for Ganesh's elephant-head is that one day Parvati, proud of the handsome face of her son, asked Shani (Saturn) to have a look at the child. She completely forgot about the disastrous effects of Shani's glance. When Shani looked, the child's head was burnt to ashes. Brahma (the creator of the universe) advised Parvati in distress to replace the head with the first she could find and the child would come to life. The first one to be found was an elephant, and this way Ganesh acquired the head of an elephant.

Another myth is that once Shiv slew Aditya, the son of a sage, though later restoredhim to life again. At this outrage, Kashyap, one of the seven great Rishis, doomed Shiv's son to lose his head. When he did lose it, the head of Indra's elephant was used to replace it. Still another version states that on one occasion after Parvati had bathed, the water was thrown into the Ganges and drunk by the elephant-headed goddess Malini who gave birth to a baby with four arms and five elephant heads. The river-goddess Ganga claimed him, but Shiv declared him to be Parvati's son, reduced his five heads to one and enthroned him as the 'Remover of obstacles' (Vighnesvara).

The mythical explanations of Ganesh's solitary tusk (Ekdanta) also make an interesting study. The most popular legend represents Parsuram (another incarnation of God with an axe as his weapon) at once coming to Mount Kailash, the abode of Shiv, the father of Ganesh. He was on a friendly visit to Shiv, who was sound asleep at the time. Ganesh opposed the entrance of the visitor to the inner apartments. A hotworded wrangle ensued, which culminated in a fight. Initially Ganesh had the advantage in the duel. He seized Parsuram with his trunk and gave him a swift twirl, which left him sick and senseless. After recovering, Parsuram threw his axe at Ganesh. As it happened this axe was given by Shiv to Parsuram as gift, recognising this as his own father's weapon, Ganesh received

ti with all humility on one of his tusks, which was immediately severed. Hence Ganesh has but one tusk and is known as the single-tusked. The other story is that on one occasion, the moon and the twenty-seven asterisms (naksatras) laughed at Ganesh's pot belly. In great rage he broke off one of his tusks and threw it at the moon which gradually became dark due to the wound.

Ganesh is depicted with having four arms. These symbolise him as the universal ruler establishing four categories of beings, viz., firstly those who can live only in water, secondly those who can live in water and earth, thirdly those who can live only on earth and lastly those who can fly in the air. Moreover it is also Ganesh, who intituted the four castes and four Vedas. One hymn in Sri Bhagavat Tathva, an ancient scripture, says: 'In heaven this child will establish the perdominance of gods, on earth that of men, in the *nether* world that of the anti-gods and serpents. He causes the four principles of the elements to move and is therefore four armed. It one hand he is shown to have a shell, in another a discus, in the third a club or a sweet cake and in the fourth a water lily.

The vehicle of Ganesh is a mouse. As rats generally succeed in ganwing their way through every obstruction, the rat symbolises this god's ability to destroy every obstacle. Being an elephant he passes through the thickest of wild growth in a forest, uproots and tears to smithereens the thickest trees hindering his path and fells outwhatever comes in his way while drilling holes like a mouse he can also slip through the narrowest of spaces and thickest of the walls. Moreover mouse is deemed to be the master of inside everything. The all-pervading Atman (soul) is the mouse that lives in the hole called Intellect, within the heart of every being. It hides itself behind the inscrutable shape of illusion.

The legend about Ganesh having preference over all other gods establishes his sharpness of intellect. There was a keen competition amongst all gods to gain the first place of worship amongst the laity. It was decided that the god, who will return first after traversing the whole universe shall be declared the winner. All gods and goddesses ran on their fast vehicles. Ganesh with his pot-bellied body and mouse's vehicle could never hope to compete.

He took a round of his parents, Shiv and Parvati, and just sat there at the starting point. He was declared the winner because one who goes round his parents and touches their feet traverses the whole universe. Since then Ganesh is always worshipped first and every other god takes a back seat. Another legend says that when Parvati saw an elephant's head being fixed on her son's body, she burst into tears and could not be soothed. To pacify her Brahma announced that amongst the worship of all the gods, that of Ganesh should for ever bear the first preference.

Ganesh has got two wives, one named Siddhi (Success) and the other named Riddhi (Prosperity). One who pleases the Lord automatically comes in the good books of his two wives. Ganesh, the embodiment of wisdom, is also depicted as a scribe to whom sage Vyasa dictated the Mahabharata. He is accepted as the god of learming and the patron of letters.

In modern age Ganesh is regarded as the personfication of those qualities which surmount all difficulties. He is the typical lord of success in life and its accompaniments of good living, prosperity and peace. Not only is Ganesh thus honoured in religious ceremonies, but in almost all civil concerns too his blessings are sought. At the head of letters, in opening pages of account books, at the entrance gate of a house and at the door of a shop, salutation to Ganesh, drawing his image or his symbol is deemed to be auspicious and a guarantee for progress and prosperity. His numerous images and shrines can be seen throughout India. In all ceremonies (except funeral rites) Ganesh is first invoked. He is revered by most Hindus, whehter followers of Shiv or Vishnu.

Ganesh was born on the fourth day of the month of Bhadrapad or Bhadon, the sixth month of the Hindu lunar calendar. Although worship of Ganesh is widespread all over India, in south and in Maharashtra the people are particularly attached to this god. The main features of the festivities are the buying or making a clay Ganesh, worshipping it in the house or a community centre and then taking it in a procession to be immersed in a river, lake or sea. The image is taken in a palanquin or on head.

Ganesh represents the unity of the Small Being, the man, with the

Great Being, the elephant. It is the blending of microcosm with macrocosm, and drop with the ocean and of individual soul with divity.

**Ganga**

River goddess. Hindu (Puranic) Guardian deity of the Ganges.The elder daughter of Himayan and Mena, she is the sister of Parvati and the consort of Visnu and Agni. She is also the second consort of Siva. Ganga is regarded as a symbol of purity and is frequently depicted with Brahma washing the raised foot of Visnu Trivikrama. According to tradition she was a heavenly river brought to earth and caught by Siva in his hair to soften the shock of her fall. She rides on a fish or water monster. Colour: white. Attributes: fly whisk, lotus and water jar.

This goddess representing the holy river of Ganges is shown as a white woman, wearing a white crown, sitting on the sea animal crocodile, holding in her right hand a water lily and in her left hand a lute.

Rig Veda mention the name of Ganga only twice but in the later period of Puranic age Ganga assumed great importance as a goddess. The legend says that she was produced from the sweat of Vishnu's feet, which Brahma caught and filled in his Kamandal (vessel-container).

The story of Ganga's coming from heaven to earth is a famous mythological tale. Sagar, a ledgendary king of Ayodhya had no children. He performed long and arduous penances as a result of which he was promised the birth of sixty thousand children. He did get these sons and when they grown up king Sagar resolved to perform the Ashvamedh yagya (the horse-sacrifice ritual). Indra the lord of heavens was alarmed and feared that Sagar would become very strong and dethrone him.

Indra descended to the earth and stealthily carried away the horse, which he placed in *patal* (the subterranean region) just near the famous sage Kapil, who was sitting there in deep meditation. The sixty thousand sons of Sagar, after searching that horse on the whole of earth, dig a hole and reached *patal*. There they found the

horse standing near a sage who was sitting woth eyes closed in meditation. They thought that he was the thief and began beating the sage Kapil, who awoke at this and in anger reduced all the princes to ashes.

The wandering sage Narad informed Sagar about the fate of his sixty thousand sons. King Sagar prayed to sage Kapil for relief, and was advised that if he could somehow bring the goddess Ganga from heavens on the earth and if the ashes were washed with her water, their salvation would come. Sagar gave the throne to the one surviving son of his and went to forest for prayers but perishad in his efforts. So also his son, who too sacrificed his life as a penance after giving throne to his son (Sagar's great grand-son), named Dalip.

Dalip had no son from any of his two wives. With god Shiv's blessings he did get a son named Bhagirath who was deformed. When this boy became young a sage blessed him and he turned into a healthy and handsome prince. Bhagirath now addressed prayers regularly to different gods for the restoration of his sixty thousand relations suffering on account of curse. He performed severe penance and prayed earnestly for a very long time. Both god Shiv and goddess Ganga were ultimately propitiated. As Ganga had to fall from heaven to earth, Bhagirath was afraid lest the earth be crushed by her fall.

Ganga swept down in three great instalments and Shiv standing on Mountain Himalaya, caught Ganaga in his matted hair to mitigate the impact. At length Shiv allowed a part of Ganga to fall on earth and Bhagirath blowing the conch given to him by god Vishnu led Ganga to leas. Later she was taken to *patal* (nether region) and so all the sixty thousand sons of Sagar were purified and saved from doom.

On way to the nether region what happened to Ganga is no less interesting. Accompanying Bhagirath Ganga asked him at what spot his sixty thousand relations were lying whom she was to deliver. As he could not inform her the location Ganga before entering the sea divided herself into one hundred streams so as to ensure the salvation of the cursed wherever they might be lying.

When Ganga was thus falling from heaven on the earth, the gods prayed to Brahma that they also needed Ganga in the heavens to wash off their sins. At this Brahma assured them that a part of Ganga would remain in heaven too. Thus the goddess Ganga is called Mandakenee in heavens, Ganga on earth and Bhagirathi in *patal.*

This goddess bears a great importance in holy books. Purans declare that the sight, the name and the touch of Ganga takes away all sins and that bathing in Ganga bestows blessings of the highest order. Not only those who bathe in Ganga obtain *Swarg* (heaven), but also those whose bones, hair, etc., are left in the river. All the land over which Ganga flows is to be regarded as hallowed ground.

The cremation of a dead body at the banks of Ganga and throwing the remains in its water even when the dead bodies are burnt elsewhere is thought propitious. It is preferred that the bones of the deceased be brought to Ganga and cast into the holy river. It is said that this leads to salvation of the deceased.

A well-known mythological story concerning Ganga is given in Mahabharat. The father of mighty Bheeshma, named Shantanu fell deeply in love with Ganga who agreed to marry him on condition that he would never criticise her nor oppose her any action which included the killing of their children. If he broke this condition she would immediately leave him. They both started living happily and seven sons were born to them. Ganga threw each child at birth into the river saying that this was for Shantanu. When the eighth child was born and she was ready to drown it, Shantanu forbade her. The life of this child named Bheeshma was thus saved but Ganga left the prince for ever.

Hindus particularly choose this river for holy rituals because the merits of works performed here become manifold in their results. Another name of Ganga is Vishnupadi, the one flowing from the foot of god Vishnu. Vishnu Puran says that Ganga encloses Brahma's great city situated on Mount Meru and then divides into four mighty rivers flowing in four directions.

Gangajal, the water of Ganga, is held so sacred that with this in

hand no Hindu dare speak untruth. Those who diwithin specified limits around Ganga, called Gangakshetra (the land of Ganga), are believed to go to the heavenly world and all their sins washed off.

The other sacred rivers for Hindus are Yamuna, Saryu, Sindhu, Godavari, Kaveri, Narmada, Gomti and Brahmputra.

The Ganges is considered to be a goddess and is supposed to be one of the consorts of Lord Siva. River Ganges, popularly known as Mother Ganges, is the mother of Bhishma, the great hero of the Mahabharata. Hinduism in its infancy used to worship river Ganges and the pracfice still holds. The Ganges is known as the river of heaven and is said to have flowed through heaven before she agreed to come down to earth. According to mythology, she was brought down from heaven by a king named Bhagirata, in order to purify the ashes of his ancestors. It is said that Mother Ganges came down reluctantly and she flowed through the matted locks of Lord Siva in order to break down her force, otherwise the earth would have been shattered by her direct impact. Some Hindus belive that the indwelling spirit causes water in the Ganges to move. River Ganges comes roaring down the Indian plains, but the source of the Ganges popularly known as *Cangotri*, is a silent lake. Mythology states that if a dying man takes a drop of Ganges water, he is assured of heaven when he dies. There are so many myths about the Ganges and those myths are passed on from generation to generation. As per mythology, bathing in the Ganges is supposed to wash away all one's sins. Since the river contains a lot of minerals, it has many medicinal qualities. The total length of the Ganges is 1,557 miles.

**Garuda** (*the devourer*)

1. Archaic sun god and divine vehicle. Hindu (Vedic). Originally depicted as a solar deity, Gardua evolves into a bird-like human hybrid who became the deified mount of Visnu. Also a chief adversary of *nagas* (snake-like demons), which he devours. In early depictions Garuda has a parrot's beak. Said to have been born from an egg, the son of Vinata and Kasyapa. Epithets include.

Amrtaharana, Garutman, Tarksya. Attributes: conch, club, lotus

and nectar, but may also bear attributes of Visnu

2. Mount or vahun of Vajiapana. Buddhist. Attributes: flower horse-head, noose, skin and staff. Three-eyed and three-headed.

**Garud**

Garud with the head and wings of eagle and sometimes with the rest of his body like that of a man, is called the king of birds and he is also the carrier of god Vishnu.

Garud is the subject of numerous mythological stories in Mahabharat and other Purans. Vinita, the wife of Kashyap, the progenitor of gods and men, laid an egg and became the mother of this bird-god. As soon as Garud was born, his body expanded and touched the sky, his eyes were like lightining, the mountains trembled with the spread of his wings. It is stated that as a result of a dispute between Vinita, the mother of Garud, and Kudroo, the mother of serpents, a continuous enmity has been going on between the two and Garud is on the look out to devour all the serpents he can find.

The story of his becoming the carrier of god Vishnu is related thus. Garud with his great strength surmounted many dangers. At last one day Garud serzed the moon and concealed it under his wings. This worried all the gods in heavens and under the leadership of Indra the gods attacked Garud. He overcame all gods but could not conquer Vishnu. However, when Garud relented god Vishnu made the bird immortal and permitted him the honour of being Vishnu's carrier.

Garud is also said to have stolen Amrit (ambrosia) from the gods in order to purchase his mother's freedom from the thraldom of Kadru, the mother of a thousand powerful manyheaded serpents. Indra discovered this theft and fought a fierce battle with Garud. The amrit was recovered but the thunderbolt of Indra was smashed in the battle.

Garud is identified with the all consuming sun's rays and popular belief credits him with the power to cure those suffering from snake bite. The mantra (hymn) that is effective in such cases reads

thus, "*Om Tarakishya* (*Garud*), cast down my enemies, trample the diseases and venom that might invade me". The emerald stone traditionally deemed as the anti-dote of poison, is also associated with Garud.

Garud is also known by another name of Vinayak, which name he shares with god Ganesh. Thus this god-bird is thought to be the remover or destroyer of obstacles.

Garud is not separately worshipped widely as an independent god; he is worshipped together with Vishnu. His image is placed near Vishnu in temples and in pictures he is shown as carrying Vishnu in the skies on its back.

The elder brother of Garud is called Urud or Aruna and he is the charioteer of Surya, the sun god. The image or this bird is shown as that of a man without thighs.

The name of Garud's son is Jatayu. This bird tried to rescue Sita, when Ravan was fleeing after kidnapping her. Ravan fights him and wounds him fatally. Ram himself cremated this bird after death and sent it to heaven.

**Gauri** (*whitish brillant*) 1. Goddes. Hindu (Vedic and Puranic). Consort of the god Varuna, said to have been created at the churning of the ocean of milk. An epither of Parvati as a goddess of milk. An epithet of Parvati as a goddess of the corn. Also a *Sakti* of Mahesvara, a minor aspect of Siva. Her attendant animal is a lion or a wolf. Attributes fish, forest garland, image of Ganesa, lotus, mirror, rosary, trident and water jar. Three-eyed. Also Varuni. 2. Goddess. Buddhist. One of eight *gauris* of terrible appearance. Attributes head and noose. 3. Messenger goddess. Jain [India]. A *sasanadevata*. Also one of sixteen vidvadevis or goddesses of learning headed by Sarasvati. Colour: white. Attribute: a hook, note Gauri-Tara is a distinct minor Buddhist goddess.

**Gautama Buddha.** See Buddha.

**Gayatri.** Personification of a hymn Hindu. The name of a popular hymn in the Rg Veda. dedicated to the sun. Also the name of one, possibly the second, of the consorts of Brahma. See Sarasvati.

**Gayatri**

Gayatri is in fact the name applied to one of the most well-known Vedic hymn consisting of twenty-four syllables. This hymn is addressed to god Surya (sun) as the supreme generative force. Being translated this hymn means "We meditate on that glorious light of the divine Surya (Sun), may he, the lord of light, illuminate our minds". It is ordained that repeating this hymn again and again leads to salvation. One who desires to attain heaven should recite it a thousand times each day. A man of the upper caste, who daily repeats the Gayatrihymn 3000 times for one month shall be freed from guilt, however great.

Gayatri later came to be personified as a goddess. She is shown having five heads and is usually seated within a lotus. She is another consort of Brahma. According to the myth one day Saraswati was late to arrive at the time when Brahma was to perform his sacrifices to gods. Brahma became very a angry because her consort's presence was indispensable to complete the ceremonies. Brahma asked the priest to fetch him any woman and wed him to her at the spot. Just in the neighbourhood was found a very lovely shepherdess. In reality she was no other person than this Vedic hymn of Gayatri incarnated in the shape of that beautiful girl. Brahma immediately married that girl and kept her as his other wife together with Saraswati.

The five heads of Gayatri represent the four Vedas of ancient Aryans and the remaining one represents the Almighty Lord himself. In her ten hands she holds all the symbols of Lord Vishnu including mace, lotus, axe, conch, sudarshan, lotus, etc. One of the sacred texts explicitly reads: "The Gayatri is Brahma, the Gayatri is Vishnu, the Gayatri is Shiva, the Gayatri is Vedas."

The importance of this hymn is accepted by all sects of Hindus. Even the Arya Samajists, who do not believe in the worship of images and idols, proclaim this hymn as the most sacred one and in every prayer of theirs repeat the holy mantra to achieve success as well as salvation.

**Ghantakarna** (*ears like bells*)

God of healing. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). An attendant of Siva, worshipped as a guardian against diseases of the skin. Attributes: bell with noose, and hammer.

NoteL there also a poorly defined goddess Ghantakarni.

**Ghantapani** (*bell in hand*)

God. Buddhist (Mahayana). One of the group of *dhyanibodhisatva* (meditation *buddhas*). An emanation of Vajrasattva. Colour: white. Attribute: a bell.

**Ghasmari** (*voractious*)

Goddess of terrifying appearance. Buddhist. One of a group of eight *gauris*. Colour: green. Attributes: staff with bell.

**Ghentu**

Minor god. Hindu Known in northern India as the god who sends the itch'.

**Gita**

Mother goddess. Buddhist-Lamaist [Tibet]. One of a group of astamataras (mothers). Colour: red. Attributes: Indian gong and lute.

**Gods of Hinduism**

As per the Christian Bible, everyghing came from the Word and the word was God. Similarly, we in Hinduism believe that everything came from *Aum* (Om) and *Aum* is God. From *Aum* cane Mother God and the Godhead that is divided into three which is popularly known as the *Trinity*. They are Brahma (God of Creation), *Vishnu* (*God of Preservation*) and Siva (*God of Annihilation*).

When each of these three Gods takes human or any other form we call that an Avatar. Vishnu's popular Avatars are Rama and Krishna. Vishnu has 10 Avatars altegether. They are: Fish, Tortoise, Boar, Nara-simha (Man-Lion), Vamana (Dwarf), Parashuama, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, and Kalki. The Kalki Avatar

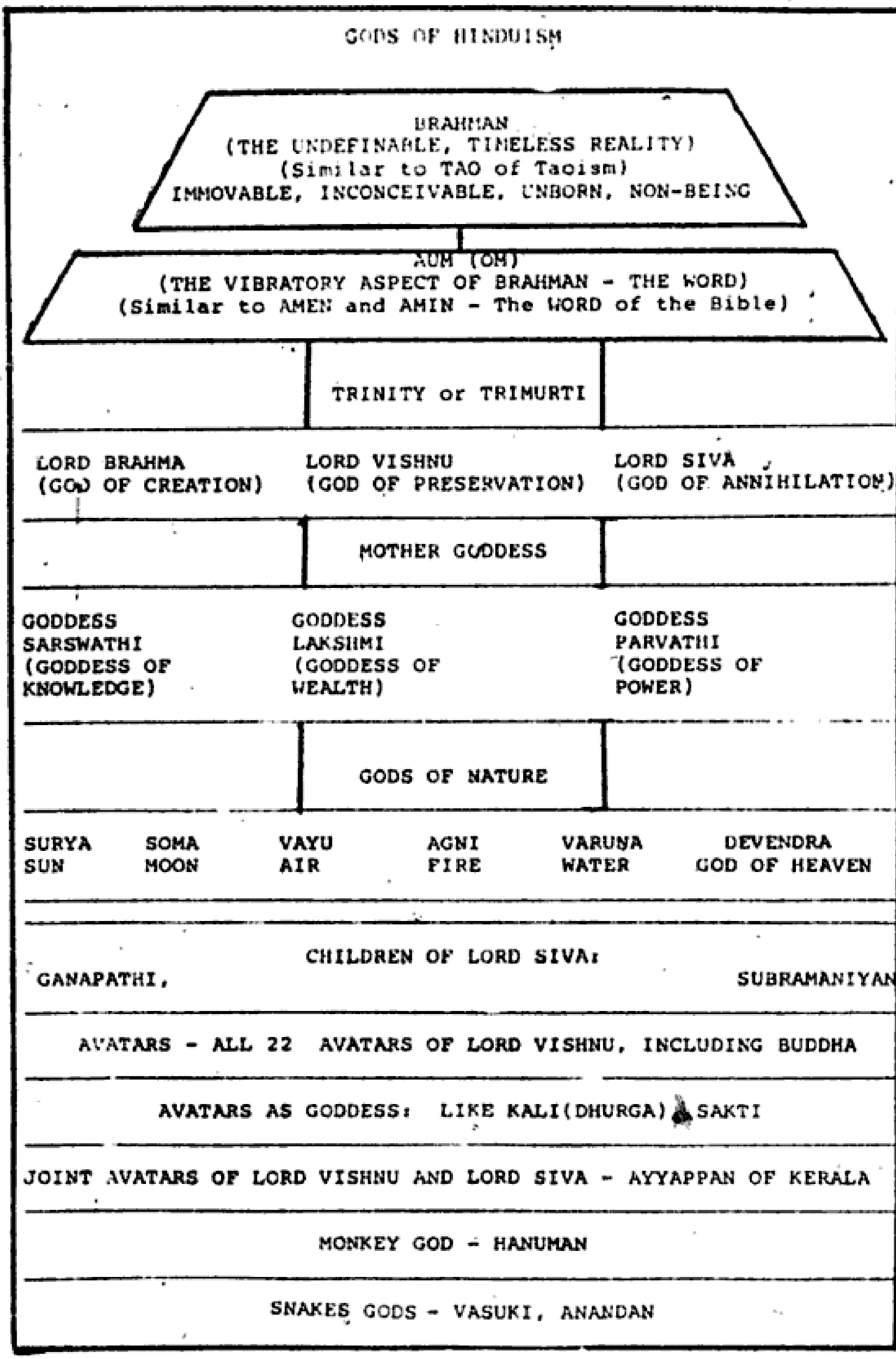

GODS OF HINDUISM
BRAHMAN
(THE UNDEFINABLE, TIMELESS REALITY)
(Similar to TAO of Taoism)
IMMOVABLE, INCONCEIVABLE, UNBORN, NON-BEING
AUM (OM)
(THE VIBRATORY ASPECT OF BRAHMAN - THE WORD)
(Similar to AMEN and AMIN - The WORD of the Bible)
TRINITY or TRIMURTI
LORD BRAHMA (GOD OF CREATION)
LORD VISHNU (GOD OF PRESERVATION)
LORD SIVA (GOD OF ANNIHILATION)
MOTHER GODDESS
GODDESS SARSWATHI (GODDESS OF KNOWLEDGE)
GODDESS LAKSHMI (GODDESS OF WEALTH)
GODDESS PARVATHI (GODDESS OF POWER)
GODS OF NATURE
SURYA SUN
SOMA MOON
VAYU AIR
AGNI FIRE
VARUNA WATER
DEVENDRA GOD OF HEAVEN
CHILDREN OF LORD SIVA:
GANAPATHI,
SUBRAMANIYAN
AVATARS - ALL 22 AVATARS OF LORD VISHNU, INCLUDING BUDDHA
AVATARS AS GODDESS: LIKE KALI(DHURGA) SAKTI
JOINT AVATARS OF LORD VISHNU AND LORD SIVA - AYYAPPAN OF KERALA
MONKEY GOD - HANUMAN
SNAKES GODS - VASUKI, ANANDAN

Fig.

OTHER GODS & GODDESSES OF HINDUISM

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THIRTY THREE GODS OF RIG-VEDA: 8 VASUS, 11 RUDRAS, 12 ADITYAS
DYAUS-THE SKY GOD &
PRITHVI - THE GODDESS OF EARTH.

RIG-VEDIC GODDESS: ADITI (incarnated as DEVAKI-mother of Krishna).

SCRIPTURAL GODS: ANILA (49 gods associated with VAYU - the wind god): ADITYA (another group of gods not connection with sun god); ABHASVARA (64 gods); GANA (the servants of Lord Ganapathi); GUHYAKA (servants of Kubera); RUDRA (the servants of god Rudra - the Dravidian god): VASUS (8 children of river Ganges, Bhishma was one of them), VALAKHILYA (sons of Rishi Kratu); VINAYAKA (companions of Lord Ganesha). There are still a lot of scriptural gods described in Hindu Puranas.

SERVANTS OF LORD SIVA: like BHAIRAVA

RISHIS - ALL RISHIS LIKE VASISTA, ATRI, AGASTHYA, PARASARA, BRIGHU, NARADA, BRIHASPATHI ETC

WIVES OF RISHIS: ARE TREATED AS GODDESSES LIKE ANUSUYA (ATRI) AND LOPA MUDRA (AGASTHYA) and ARUNDHATI (VASISHTA)

GANDHARVAS - CELESTIAL BEINGS

APSARASES - CELESTIAL FEMALE BEINGS LIKE URVASI, MENAKA ETC

MINOR GODDESSES: YOGINIS (attendants of Dhurga); DAKINIS (female imps who feed on human flesh); BHAIRAVIS (female servants of Siva), GRAHIS (witches who attack newborn babies)

PLANETARY GODS: ALMOST ALL PLANETS ARE GODS LIKE, MOON, JUPITER, SATURN, MERCURY, VENUS ETC

GOD OF WEALTH: KUBERA
GOD OF BIRDS: GARUDA
GOD OF MOUNTAINS: HIMAVAN
GOD OF SNAKES: ANATHAN
GODDESS OF RIVERS: GANGES
GOD OF FOUR-LEGGED ANIMALS: NANDI - the bull of Lord Siva
GODS WHO PROTECT FIELDS: KSHETRAPALAS
GODS WHO PROTECT GATES: DVARAPALS

GODS OF VILLAGE: GRAMADEVATAS
GODDESSES OF SOUTH: ELAMMA, TIPAMMA ETC
GODDESS OF BOMBAY: MAHAMABA-Bombay got the name from this goddess
GODDESS OF SMALL-POX: SITALA

DEPARTED SAINTS: ALMOST ALL OF THEM ARE TREATED AS GODS.

PROPHETS SUCH AS JESUS CHRIST, MOHAMMAD, MOSES, SUFIS ETC

TOTAL: 330,000,003 GODS - A FIGURE MIGHT BE AN APPROXIMATE CALCULATION, SOME HOW ASSOCIATED WITH THE 33 GODS OF RIG-VEDA.

Fig.

is yet to come. It will come at the end of Kali Yuga, when the whole world goes under floods (deluge).

Sive meaning "the Auspicious One" is a *personification of destruction as well as the destruction of Ego.* He is usually represented as having the river Ganga running through his matted locks and snakes around his neck.

Consorts of all these gods are known as goddesses. They are Saraswati-wife of Brahma as well as Goddess of Knowledge, Lokshmi-wife Vishnu as well as Goddess of Prosperity, Parvati-wife of Siva as well as *Goddess of Power.*

Since Hinduism started as a slowly developed thinking process, it has a large number of gods. Many of them represent powers of nature like Vayau (Air), Varuna (Water), Agni (Fire), Aditya (Sun), etc. And also other semi-gods like, Ananta (Serpent god) , Hanuman (Monkey god), Indra (god of heaven), Yama (god of death).

Lord Siva has two sons and both are gods. Subramanya is the second son and he is God of Astrology. Ganapati or Ganesha is his first son, who has the face of an elephant and is described as "He who removes all obstacles". Siva actually has two more sons. One is Hanuman (Monkey god) and the other is Sri Ayyappan. Hanuman is also known as the son of Vayu, since Parvati (consort of Siva) transferred her pregnancy to the womb of the consort of Vayu, and she delivered Hanuman.

Krishna, the Avatar of Vishnu, is worshipped throughout India in many ways. The actual meaning of Krishna is "The Dark One". Krishna's popular consort's name is Radha.

Buddha, even though an Avatar of Vishnu, is not worshipped much among Hindus, Kali, the Mother God, is worshipped very much in the State of Bengal. The most popular devotee of Kali is Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. The notorious tribes of India, *Thugs,* also worshipped Kali, and due to their extreme fanaticism and killing of people as sacrifices to goddess Kali, they were exterminated by the British rulers of India.

Hinduism repeatedly states that there is only one God. The Vedas call him *Brahman.* The Upanishads explain him by the *Neti-Neti* (Not this—Not this) method. Sometimes God is referred to as *That,* an inanimate object, since no human description can ever do justice to His magnitude. Now coming back' to your main question of so many gods, it is quite simple to explain. Ordinary human beings can only grasp a god in human form and they resort to different forms of worship to different dieties, even though they are all actually worshipping one god.

To elaborate further, let us take your mother as an example. You look at her has your beloved mother, who takes care of you; I look at her as my partner in life, with whom I can share everything in life; her father looks at her as a little girl, who still has a lot to learn. See now, there is only one person, but three of us are seeing that person from three different angles. All three of us are right in seeing her differently, although there is only one person. So even if you worship hundreds of gods, you are actually worshipping one supreme being, one God. Of course, it is difficult for westerners to digest that ideology easily. In Hinduism, some deities are symbolically considered the rulers or protectors of directions of space. Both the Upanishads and Puranas slightly differ in the configuation of deities who rule different directions of space. Anyway, the most uptodate list is an follows:

*Eastern direction* is protected by *Indra,* god of heaven. *Western direction* is protected by *Varuna,* god of waters. *Northern direction* is protected by *Kubera,* god of wealth. Southern diection is protected by *Yama,* god of death. North-Eastern direction is protected by *Soman* (Moon). North-Western direction is protected by Vayu, god of air. South-Eastern direction is protected by Agni. god of fire. South-Western direction is protected by Surya, Sun-god.

I don't think I could ever give you a complete list of all the gods in Hindulsm. Some say that there are at least thirty-three and three-fourth crores gods in Hinduism. Even some saints are considered as gods. Again many of the gods worshipped by Hindus have different names in the Vedas. For example, Lord Siva is

known as Rudra in the Vedas. The act of worshipping so many gods at the same time is no problem for Hindus, since they believe that all forms are manifestations of the one God or power.

There are a large number of minor gods in Hinduism. They are mostly Gandharvas (celestial beings), Apsaras (celestial females), Devas (attendants of the god of heaven) and Nagas (snakes). All attendants of Lord Siva are also considered as minor gods. Apart from that many departed saints are also worshipped as minor gods.

It is said that Nagas (snakes) are children of a saintnamed Kashyapa. According to the *Varaha Purana*, they occupy the three lower worlds, namely *Patala*, *Atala*, and *Sutala*. Of all the Nagas, three are most prominent. They are *Vasuki*, *Sesha* (*Ananta*) and *Takshaka*. Vasuki is the snake we see crawling around the neck of Lord Siva and in mythology it helped as a rope to churn the ocean of milk. Sesha or Ananta has one thousand heads and it is on this snake that Lord Vishnu sleeps in Vaikunta. Takshaka always gets into trouble and is very vicious. It tried to annihilate Arjuna, the great hero of the Mahabharata and at the end of the Mahabharata war, he managed to kill king Parikshit, the last heir of the Pandavas. The Nagas are worshipped in many Hindu temples along with the major and minor gods.

The Upanishads have maintained the existence of one God known as Brahman. The only reference to multiple gods in the Upanishads comes from a conversation in Brihadaranyaka Upanishad between a devotee named Vidagdha Sakalya and Sage Yajnavalkya. The lively conversation is as follows:

"How many gods are there, Yajnavalkya?"

"Three thousand three hundred and six," replied

Yajnavalkya.

"Yes, but just how many gods are there, Yajnavalkya?"

"Thirty-three," answered Yajanavalkya.

"Yes, but just how many gods are there, Yajnavalkya?"

"Six," said the great saint.

"Yes, but just how many gods are there, Yajnavalkya?"

"Three".

"Yes, but just how many gods are there, Yajnavalkya?"

"Two."

"Yes, but just how many gods are there, Yajnavalkya?"

"One and a half."

"Yes, but just how many gods are there, Yajnavalkya?"

"O N E", answered the great teacher of Hinduism.

This conversation makes us conclude that even though there are many gods, in reality there is only ONE. One God appears in a thousand different formes to devotees according to the way they perceive that supreme power.

Nataraja is the dancing god .of India, who is actually Lord Siva. Nataraja is very popular in the west. You may have seen Nataraja statues even in some James Bond movies. *Nata* means Dance and *Raja* means King. Lord Siva is supposed to be dancing over the demon *Apasmara*, Ignorance—He who makes us forget who we really are, the Ego. Nataraja brings about the destruction of the Ego.

He is also the visible symbol of the Rhythm of the Universe. He is encircled by a ring of flames, symbolising the vital processes of universal creation. The *Mudras*, hand-expressions of the deity, represent different activities. In one hand Lord Nataraja holds a drum, the symbol of speech, his second hand shows Abhaya Madra ("Fear not - I will protect you" sign), in the palm of his third hand, he has a tongue of fire as a symbol of destruction and the fourth hand points downward to the uplifted foot. It symbolises the salvation of the devotee.

Hindus worship Lord Siva as *Siva Linga* (phallus and Yoni), as Nataraja (Dancer) as *Kakshinamurthi* (a meditating ascetic), as *Kalyanasundara* (the husband of Parvti), as Tripurantaka (destroyer of demons like Tripura), as *Ardhanarishwara* (halwoman God), as *Bhairava* (the destroyer) as *Maheshwarn* (the



Fig.

lord of knowledge), as *Hara* (the remover of death). Among them Siva Linga is the most common form of image of Lord Siva one will see in most Hindu temples.

Nandi''? It is a bull with milk white or snow white color and is the vehicle of Lord Siva. Its neck is thick and horns are as hard as diamonds. You will see Nandi outside every Siva temple. ***It is the guardian of all four-legged animals.***

Do Hindus worship Lord Brahma? It may be surprising to you to hear that Hindus generally do not worship Lord Brahma. The liberation of the soul is connected with Lord Vishnu and Lord Siva and that may be the reason why Lord Brahma is not worshipped by Hindus. Of course, there are representations of Lord Brahma in most temples and his name is repeated in rituals. The *Skanda Purana* gives a number of reasons why Lord Brahma is no worshipped like Lord Vishnu and Lord Siva. One of the reason is that he was cursed by Lord Siva never to be worshipped by mortals since Lord Brahma once lied to Lord Siva.

**Goraknath**

Guardian god. Hindu. An *avatara* of Siva, worshipped amongst cow- herders and the founder of the *gorakhanthi* sect in Nepal.

**Grahamatrka** (*demon mother*)

Goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). One of the forms of Vairocana. Attributes: arrow, bow, lotus and staff. Three-headed.

**Gramadevata**

Generic term for a local futelary deity. India. Such deities are identified as not being served by Brahman priess'. Most are goddesses e.g. Camunda, Durga and Kali. Generally they are invoked in small villages where they guard boundaries and fields and are represented by a painted stone, but they are also to be found in larger towns and cities.

**Grdhrasya** (*face of a vulture*)

Minor goddess. uddhist.

**Great War of Mahabharta**

**One The Eve of War**

Krishna returned to the Pandavas at Upalavya. He told them the failure of his mission, because Duryodhana was adamant, and would not see reason. Now, the war was the only alternative left to them. It shocked Yudhisthira. He was dumbfound with the probable holocaust. The Pandavas had to prepare for the war. And it delighted Draupadi. In her imagination she saw the earth drenched with the Kaurava blood. She saw the Kaurava ladies wailing and weeping for their dead husbands and sons near relations. It gave her a great satisfaction.

Soon the hectic war preparation reached their heights. Kings and princes began to assemble with their armies at Kurukshetra. Many of them had common blood relations with Kauravas and the Pandavas. It was difficult for them to decide in favour of the either. But then, they had to take the decison, and there was not much time left. As we have seen, Krishna had already decided in favour of the Pandavas, but his brother Balrama remained neutral. He chose not

to take any side. He had equal affection both for Duryodhana and Bhima, his disciples. This enactment of great tragedy made Balrama sad and disinterested, and he set out on a pilgrimage.

The armies began to pour in the famous plains of Kurukshetra. Everybody was extremely excited. The seven Akshauhini army of the Pandavas, under the command of Draupada, Virata, Dhrishtadyumna, Satyaki, Shikhandin, Chekitana and Bhima stood there, facing the east. Dhrishtadyumna was made the commander-in-chief. Tents were being erected. Chariots rumbled, elephants trumpted, horses neighted, conches blew, soldiers shouted and fiexed their arms, drums roared and the sky was rent with the great pandemonium. The soldiers waited with bated breath for the great war to begin.

The long, waiting night passed, and the new day dawned. The Kaurava heroes marshalled their eleven Akshauhini and marched towards Kurukshetra. Kripa, Drona, Salya, Jayadrath, Dudakshina, Kritvarman, Aswathama, Karna, Bhoorisravas, Shakuni and Somadatta headed each Akshauhini. Soon it stood facing the Pandava army. Both the armies looked like two agitated oceans at the time of final Dissolution.

Duryodhana approached Bhishma, made him obeisance and prayed him to become the supreme commander of the Kaurava-Sena. Bhishma readily agreed, but on two conditions. He said, "I shall destroy Pandava army, but not the Pandava princes. They are as dear to me as you and your brothers are. The second condition is, either Karna or I fight. We both cannot get on together."

Cut to the quick, Karna said, "I shall not fight till Bhishma is there. As soon as he is dead and gone I will enter the battle and fight for you." Bhishma was appointed the supreme commander amidst great cheers celebrations and blowing of the conches.

The two opposing armies stood fully prepared. Vyasa paid a visit to Dhritarashtra and said, "Your sons and the heroci kings allied with him are doomed. It is pre-ordained. I can grant you vision, it you wish to see the war and destruction."

"Who would like to see his sons and kinsmen destroyed, my lord?

said Dhritarashtra. "However, I would like to hear it told faithfully."

"So be it. I grant Sanjay divine vision and insight. He will see everything that happens there, nothing would escape his vision. He will relate everything to you faithfully.

Duryodhana moved amidst the ranks of his army giving instructions. He told Dushasana to be ever on Bhishma's guard along with other best soldiers. He was to be protected especially against Shikhandin, who was born a woman, but later on changed into a man. Bhishma had declined to fight against him, since he was born a female, and the Pandavas might take advantage of it.

Seeing the far formidable army of the Kauravas, Yudhisthira consulted Arjuna. And they decided to arrange their army in Vajra formation. The magnificent golden chariot of Arjuna with its monkey banner could be seen from a far distance. His white horses shone brightly in the morning sun. Krishna sat on the charioteer's seat with a large beaming smile.

All at once, Yudhisthira took off his armour, dropped his weapons on the ground, and walked towards enemy army. It amazed everyone. The noise was hushed into silence. Bhima ran after Yudhisthira and then Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva. Yudhisthira walked fast barefooted, went to Bhishma and wowing low before him asked his benediction and permission to begin the war. It pleased Bhishma mightly and he blessed him. Then, Yudhisthira went to Drona, Kripa and Salya, obtained their blessings and returned to his side.

Seeing the Pandava army well arranged, Duryodhana approached Drona with reverence and said, "See, my master, how your disciple Dhrishtadymna has so nicely marahalled his army. There stand heroic Arjuna, Bhima, Virata, Drupada and others. And we have, O master, the distinguished warriors like your venerable- self, Bhishma, Karna, Kripa, Aswathama and so many others, ready to lay down their lives for me." In order to inspire Duryodhana's spirit, the mighty grandsire, Bhishma blew his conch, like a lion roaring. And the blared forth all the conches, drums, trumpets,

horns and tabors renting the air. The Pandavas and their generals blew their divine conches in reply. Krishna blew Panchjanya, Arjuna blew Devadatta. Vrikodara and Yudhisthira blew Paundra and Anatavijaya. Nakula and Sahadeva blew Sughosha and Manipushpaka. Others blew their several conches, filling the welkin and the earth with a tumultuous uproar, that rent the enemy hearts.

**The Bhagvad Gita**

The war was about to begin; Arjuna saw nostalgically in the opposing armies uncles, grandfathers, teachers, cousins, sons, grandsons, friends and other kinsmen. He overcome with pity, and chocked with compassion he said, "O Krishna, seeing these kinsmen, my limbs fail, body trembles, mouth is parched and the Gandiva slips from my hand. O Keshava, what good is there in killing these kinsmen. I do not want victory. Even if they slay me, I will not protest and fight. Better I am slain than I slay them."

So saying, overwhelmed with pity and sorrow., Arjuna dropped his Gandiva bow and arrows on the ground. He slumped down on the seat of his chariot. The Krishna cheering and urging Aujuna to follow his Kshatriya dharma, very lovingly said:

"O Arjuna yield not to despondency. The wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead. One who maintains his equanimity in pain and pleasure is the best.

"Whoever sees the Atman as slayer, and whoever considers it slain both are ignorant. Atman neither slays, nor is slain. It neither takes birth nor does it die. Atman is unborn, eternal and ancient. It is not destroyed when the body is killed.

"As a man casts off his worn-out clothes and puts on new ones, so the embodied Atman casts off worn out bodies and enters into a new one. Neither weapons can cleave Atman, nor can fire burn it. Neither water can wet it, nor can wind dry.

"You have no cause either to grieve or to waver. What is more welcome to Kshatriya that a righteous war? It is an open gateway to heaven for those who die fighting. Slain, you reach heaven;

victorious, you enjoy the kingodom. Therfore, rise up, and fight!

"Do your duty with equanimity, and aspire not for its fruits. Surrender to me all your actions and their fruits. I am unborn and imperishable, yet I embody myself whenever there is a decay of dharma and increase in a dharma. For the protection of the good, the annihilation of wicked, and the establishment of dharma I incarnate age after age.

"O Arjuna, I am the self present in all beings. I am beginning, the middle and the end of all beings. There is no end to my menifestations. Whatever being there is glorious, prospersous or mighty, they all have their origin from me."

Arjuna said, "O Lotus-eyed, your divine discourse has removed all my delusions. O my Supreme Master, grant my your vision of Eternal Self."

Then, Krishna granting Arjuna divine sight, showed His Supreme Purushothama form. Arjuna beheld the whole universe, with the splendour of a thousand suns. Parth stood amazed with folded hands before that awesome universal form and saw the Kauravas with their army, Bhishma, Drona and others hurrying into the fearful mouth of the Supreme-being. Krishna said, "I am Time, the supreme destroyer. Even without you, the opposing armies arrayed shall be destroyed. Rise up, win fame. Conquer the enemy and enjoy their kingdom. They have already been slain by me. You are merely an outward cause. Be not distressed, fight and you carry the day."

Arjuna tremblingly prostrated before Krishna and said with joined palms, "O Infinite Being, My salutation to you again and again. I implore you to forgive my ignorance. Be merciful and forgive me. Bear with me as a father with a son, as a friend with a friend, as a lover with his beloved. I desire to see you as before, crowned, bearing a mace and discus in the hand, having four arms."

Krishna showed Arjuna his former gentle form and it restored Arjuna's composure and peace. Krishna said, "One attains the highest perfection through devotion to one's duty. One should not abandon the duty to which one is born. Fix your mind in me and

win my grace. Seek refuge in me alone. I shall lliberate you from all bondages. O Partha, have you listened it attentively? Has your delusion been destroyed?"

"Yes my Lord, my delusion is gone for ever. Through your grace I am firm and free from doubt. I will fight and follow your advice," said Arjuna.

Arjuna took up his fallen Gandiva and the Pandava army gave out a loud roar. And the great war began.

**The Battle Begins**

The battle began with a great tumult. The uproar rent the air. Arrows sped in all the directions like shooting stars. Dushasana led the Kaurava army, and Bhima the Pandava host. As the battle progressed, the things for the Pandavas became for more grim. Bhishma penetrated the enemy defences and carried doom with him. Seeing his forces being routed, Abhimanyu came up to Bhishma and cashed with the grandsire. Abhimanyu shot serpent-like arrows at the five kings protecting Bhishma from the flanks. But Bhishma held his ground firmly. His swift and soldiers in hundreds and the Pandava army ran in panic, crying for help.

Abhimanyu again tried to chech the advancing Bhishma, and exhibited great skill and courage. The Kaurava generals made a combined attack on the valiant son of Arjuna, but he stood his ground and with a sharp speeding arrow cut down Bhishma's streaming banner. Bhishma was all praise for him.

Bhishma had to use his best skills against his youth. Seeing him in danger, Bhima, Virata, Uttara and Dhrishtadyumna came to his help, and fiercely attacked the grandsire. Uttar riding a huge hill like elephant, trampled Salya's chariot and horses. Salya in great rage killed Uttara with his javelin and slew the elephant. Seeing his younger brother slain, Sveta pressed forward in great anger and clashed with Salya. Immediately seven warriors rushed to Salya's help, but Sveta defended himself very dextrously. He fiercely attacked Bhishma, who in his turn killed Saveta with a deadly arrow. The Pandava army was completely routed.

It greatly alarmed Yudhisthira, and he went to Krishna, accompanied by his brothers and generals. He said, "O Krishna see what terrible Bhishma has done to our army. Now, what should be done. I am so despondent."

Krishna encouraging Yudhisthira said, "Do not be depressed. we have so many valiant generals and warriors, and then I am here. Shikhandin will surely kill Bhishma."

Satisfied. Yudhisthira returned to his camp, to snatch some rest before the another dawned and the terrible war began a new.

The initial defeat and setback made the Pandava general wiser. The second day Dhrishtakyumna arrayed his forces with great care, and a new battle formation called Krauncha was employed. Arjuna spearheaded this battle formation.

In the enermy camp, Duryodhana, filled with pride, due to the first day's success, encouraging his army, arranged it in a counter formation. It was spearheaded by the grandsire Bhishma. Bhishma again marched forward, heroically through the Pandava formation and killed large number of soldiers.

Arjuna got furious at it and asked Krishna to drive him towards Bhishma. Within no time, they stood face to face, and the fight ensued. Arjuna shot several sharp arrows at Bhishma, and the latter suitably replied them. The kings protecting the grandsire from the flanks, made a combined attack on Arjuna, but Arjuna repulsed it easily and they had to retreat. Arjuna's skill with his divine bow Gandiva, was a thing to be watched and admired. He shot at Bhishma and others with his bow with a lightning speed.

The fight between these two lion-like warriors continued and gods from above in the sky saw it and profusely admired. Arrows from either side came shooting like meteors and clashed in the atmosphere. The fight was well and equally balanced. Bhishma struck Krishna's chest with an arrow. And in return, Arjuna killed Bhishma's charioteer.

At another place, Drona and Drupada fought a fierce duel. The old enemies were giving vent freely to their accumulated anger.

Dhrishtadyumna came to his father's help. Duryodhana sent the king of Kalinga to protect Bhishma, Bhima rushed into the enemy formation devasting the army. Turning towards Bhishma, he give him a grim fight. Satyaki and others joined Bhima. Satyaki killed Bhishma's charoter, and the horses of Bhishma's chariot bolted carrying Bhishma away.

There was a great sense of satisfaction and joy amidst the Pandava generals. The embraced each other with pleasure. Kalinga and his associate warrior had already been routed and slain.

As the sun set in the west, the fight stopped and the Kaurava generals heaved a sigh of relief. In the Pandava camp, there was a great jubilation and cheering.

**Krishna is Worked Up**

On the third day, Bhishma arranged his army in Garuda formation. The Pandavas adopted crescent formation as a counter strategy. The battle began and grew fiercer.

The dust raised by elephants, chariots, horses and foot soldiers covered the sky, and the sun became invisible. Bhishma, supported by Drona, Jayadratha and Shakuni, destroyed the enemy soldiers in large numbers. Arjuna made a poowerful attack, but Kauravas stood their ground.

Abhimanyu and Satyaki engaged Shakuni. Shakuni destroyed Satyaki's chariot, but Satyaki continued the fight form Abhimanyu's chariot and compelled Shakuni to retreat.

Bhima and his son Ghatotakacha together attacked Duryodhana. Hit with a sharp arrow from Bhima, Duryodhana fainted and his charioteer cleverly steered him away from the battlefield to a safe place.

When Duryodhana came to his sense, and returned to the secene, he was horrified to see the destruction in his army ranks. He approached Bhishma and said, "O grandsire, how is it that our forces are being routed in your presence. I can see through your partiality for the Pandavas. If you hold me in affection, use the best of your war skills and destroy the enemy."

Bhishma smiled and said. "O my son, it is because of my love for you that I am here, leading your forces. In the very beginning I told you that the Pandavas are invincible. I am doing my utmost in destroying the enemy forces, and you know I am quite an old man."

With these words Bhishma resumed fighting. He rallied his forces, attacked with renewed energy and struck terror among the enemy ranks. Blood flowed in streams, heads, crowned and ornamented rolled like stones. The repeated twangs of his mighty bow rent the air. None dared to face him. The Pandava forces were so demoralised that even the best efforts of Arjuna and Shikhadin to rally them failed.

Krishna saw the Pandava forces routed. He urged Arjuna to face the challenge heroically and to destroy Bhishma and his supporters ruthlessly. He took the chariot where Bhishma was. Arjuna enraged, cut Bhishma's banner into two and a terrible fight between these two, the best of warriors and men began. But Krishna found Arjuna fighting with his dear ancient grandsire and not an enemy. Arjuna had a soft corner for Bhishma. It became unbearable for Krishna.

The illustrious Krishna was so worked up that he forgot about his human form. He thought of his divine form, jumped down the chariot, and dashed towards Bhishma, with Sudarshana-chakra in hand. He looked terrible like the very Death-god. All the beholders were horrified, and felt the dissolution had come.

Seeing Krishna so enraged and in his divine form, Bhishma said unperturbed, "O Lord of lords, my humble salutations to you. On Lotus-eyed, you have honoured me by comming down your chariot to fight with me. Please slay and release me from the human bondage. I cannot imagine a nobler death than this at your hands. I shall be famous in the three worlds. Delay not and grant me this boon."

Arjuna in great distress, jumped down his chariot and came running after Krishna. He caught Krishna by the hand, fell at his feet and prayed, "Give up your anger, my Lord, and bear with me.

Remember your pledge not to take arms. I promise to fulfil my word. I shall accomplish what I have promised."

Krishna pacified, returned to the chariot and once again held the reins. Krishna blew his Panchajanya and Arjuna his Devadatta, and the four quarters resounded. The fighting was resumed and Arjuna fighting furiously, like a possessed warrior, killed the enemy in thousands. In the afternoon of the third day, the Kauravas suffered a crushing defeat.

The sun touched the sky-line in the west, and the armies were withdraw. The fighting being over, the soldiers and the generals returned to their camps. During the night, in the torch light, the Kaurava generals sat talking about Arjuna's marvellous prowess and fighting skill, till their eyes closed with sleep and exhaustion.

**Duryodhana is Disgraced**

On the fourth day, at the day break, Bhishma arrayed his forces anew. At the command of Bhishma, the army pressed forward and the battle began. Aswathama, Salya and others made a combined attack on young Abhimanyu. Arjuna seeing this combined attack on his son rushed to help him. Meanwhile, Dhrishtadyumna also arrived there and a fierce battle ensued.

Bhima and Duryodhana fought a pitched battle with their maces. The king of Magadha came to Duryodhana's help, riding a magnificent elephant. Bhima like a lion killed the elephant and tore the enemy defences to shreds. He killed eight of Duryodhana's brothers. Bhisham sent Bhagdatta to challenge Bhima. Bhagdatta made Bhima swoon with a deadly javelin. Ghatotkacha rushed to Bhima's help and harassed Bhagdatta to his hart's content.

The sun was about to set. With the coming of night the prowess of Rakshasa Ghatotkacha was likely to increase manifold. Therefore, Bhishma withdrew his forces earlier than expected and the fight stopped. The Pandavas retired voctorious and praising Ghatotkacha.

Duryodhana too retired, but he did not know any rest. He wept hot tears at the death of his eight brothers at the hands of Bhima. He

could foresee the death of Sushasana, and was horrified. Impatiently he stamped the ground and then by himself went to Bhishma the grandsire, and said, "O grandfather, how is it that eight of my beloved brothers have been killed by Bhima, in the very presence of you, Drona and other heroic generals of our army? What is the secret of the Pandava's consecutive victory and our defeat?"

Bhishma said, "As before I once again advise you to make your peace with the sons of Pandu. Stop this holocaust. It is impossible to defeat the Pandavas, because Krishna, the incarnation of Vishnu, the protector of dharma is with them. It is never too late to repent."

Duryodhana got up without saying a word in reply, and stole towards his camp, downcast and despaired.

Bhishma also remained sleepless. He was sorry for Duryodhana, but was helpless before the inscrutable and inevitable fate. He knew well self-willed Duryodhana, who would die rather than make any compromise with his cousins.

The night passed and another day dawned. It was the fifth day since the battle began. Bhishma arrayed his army into a crocodile formation.

As a counter strategy, the Pandavas arranged their forces in the hawk formation. The battle resumed and Bhishma punished the enemy ranks ruthlessly. With great difficulty Arjuna could hold Bhishma in check.

At another place, Drona and Satyaki fought a grim battle. It grew still fiercer. Bhima rushed to help Satyaki, and then they were joined by Shikhandin. Salya and Bhishma came to Drona's help. Bhishma tuned away on seeeing Shikhandin, because he was woman turned man. Therefore, Drona attacked Shikhandin, and forced him to retreat.

In the afternoon Satyaki fought excellently with Bhoorisravas. The duel lasted a long time, but finally Satyaki began to show the signs of tiresness, and Bhima came to his rescue and took him away in his own chariot. The sun was about to set. The warriors withdrew

from the fight and retired exhausted.

The sixth day witnessed the same gruelling fight between the opposing forces. The day began with a fierce fight between Drona and Bhima. Bhima killed Drona's charioteer. Enraged Drona broke the enemy formation and killed soldiers in a great number.

The brothers of Duryodhana made a combined attack on Bhima and tried to take him prisoner. It made Bhima furious, and he jumping down his chariot and wielding his fomidable mace entered the enemy ranks causing great havoc. Surrounded by the enemy, Bhima stood his ground like a lion amidst elephants. Dhrishtadyumna rushed to help Bhima, and they together slaughtered the enemies. Dhrishtadyumna, with a mysterious weapon of illusion caused stupor in the enemy foces. But then Drona hurled a counter-weapon and removed the stupor. Abhimanyu came with a big force to help Bhima and Dhrishtadyumna.

Bhima and Duryodhana met once again and a terrible duel followed. Bhima, with an intention to kill Duryodhana, hit him hard and Duryodhana fell down unconscious. Jayadratha, helped by Kripa, took him away to safety in his chariot.

The sun was wetting in the west. The armies were withrawn and the fight ceased for the day. Yudhisthira was happy to see Bhima and Dhrishtadyumna back safe and sound.

**Before the Tenth Day**

The another day dawned. And with it the battle began anew. Blood flowed afresh in streams, drenching the earth. The heads rolled, and the dead and dying lay in heaps.

Day after day the battle raged, fortunes, fluctuated. Sometimes the Pandavas carried the day, and sometimes the Kauravas won. Bhishma was the Kaurava hero. Wherever he went, he took death and destrunction with him. On the Pandavas side Arjuna, Abhimanyu and Bhima did remarkably well. Their immense courage stood them in good stead. Abhimanyu, the valiant son of Arjuna and Subhadra, many times gave crushing defeat to the

enemy, and won applause of friends and foes alike.

Bhima moved down the enemy. He killed many brothers of Duryodhana, and challenged Bhishma and others single-handed. His courage never failed him. He never turned his back to the enemy. Bhima's son Ghatotkacha, was the hero of the eighth day's battle. He defeated and disgraced Duryodhana in the fight. The destruction caused by Ghatotkacha was tremendous. Duryodhana fought most valiantly against Ghatotkacha, but was finally worsted and eight more of his brothers were slain.

Before the battle began the next day, Duryodhana, despaired and sadly repaired to the grandsire. He expressed his feeling full of bitterness, and said words sharp as the arrows. Bhishma was cut to the quick, but he restrained himself. He encouraged Duryodhana but expressed his helplessness against Shikhandin. He also told him again that killing of the Pandava princes by him was an impossibility but he would do his best to destroy the enemy.

The day began with fierce combats between Abhimanyu and Alambusa, Satyaki and Aswathama, and between Arjuna and Drona. The Pandavas then made combined attack on Bhishma. Duryodhana sent his brother Dushasana to protect Bhishma. Bhishma sent showers of fiery arrows and the enemy flew helter-skelter. The Pandava forces once again were completely demoralised. The combined efforts and attack of the Pandavas failed fotally against Bhishma. He appeared like the Death-god himself, scattering doom and death wherever he went.

Krishna urged Arjuna again and again to defeat and slay Bhishma. He knew well the till the grandsire was alive victory would never be their's.

Arjuna rallied his forces. He cut down Bhishma's bow with his sharp arrows time and again. But Bhishma checked the advance of Arjuna with a thick and quick shower of shafts. Bhishma fought with renewed energy and determination. Obviously, Arjuna's heart was not there in the fight. He was fighting reluctantly against his anicient grandsire. He loved him too deeply to kill him. He could not bring himself to do the terrible deed.

Krishna could not bear it any longer. He beside himself with rage, umped off flaming charot and deshed towards Bhishma, roaring like a lion, with the famous discus in his hand.

Bhishma remained cool and collected, and smiling said, "Come, honour me by slaying with your own hands Quick I am waiting."

But Arjuna ran after him in distress and held back with his arms. Arjuna fell at Krshna's feet, pleading and persuding him not to break his pledge by taking arms. Arjuna said, "I beg you, my lord, desist from it. You have promised not to use any weapons. I swear to kill the grandsire. I will not fail."

It pleased Krishna, but he did not show it. He knew the veil of attachment has been removed from Arjuna's mind. Gravė and silent Krishna got up the chariot and held the reins.

The ninth day of the war was dying with the sun setting in the west. The fighting had ceased, and the warrors were returning weary to their camps.

**The Fall of Bhishma**

The ruthless devastation of the Pandava army by Bhishma on ninth day, made Yudhisthira speechless with grief. He went to Krishna, and sought his advice and help.

Krishna said, "You have no reason to despair. There are Arjuna and Bhima and myself to help you. I can destroy Bhishma single-handed. But Arjuna has sworn to kill the grandsire himself. Arjuna will do his jab as soon as he determines to do it.

Yudhisthira's eyes were wet with gratitude, and he thanked Krishna again and again. Yudhisthira then proposed that they should go and ask Bhishma himsefl, how he can be killed. He would certainly tell it out of deep love for them.

The five brothers, led by Krishna, went to Bhishma's tent, made obeisance to him, and revealed the purpose of their coming. The Grandsire was pleased to receive them. He blessed them, stroked their heads with love and said, "Victory for you is impossible till am there. I am invincible even for the gods. But I shall be happy if I am released from this bondage. Only either Krishna or Arjuna can

oblige me. Arjuna, my child, you do me this favour tomorrow. Keep Shikhandin before you and from behind shoot your arrows at me. I will not fight with Shikhandin, since he is a woman turned man. You all know his story. I know how he hates me. I can think of him only as a woman, and not as a man. Thus you can kill me and the victory will be yours."

They fell a Bhishma's feet and returned to their camp. But Arjuna felt a lump in his throat and said with a voice choked. "How can I do this. O Krishna, how can I enjoy the victory stained with dear grandfather's precious blood."

Krishna urged Arjuna in no uncertain terms to kill Bhishma at the very first opportunity. He reminded Arjuna of his pledge and his Kshatriya dharma. He told him that it has been so ordained by the gods, and he should not shirk his duty.

On the next morning, the tenth day of the battle, it all happened. Arjuna was firm in his purpose. As usual, Bhishma led the Kaurava forces, protected by other heroes. Bhishma began his work of devastation. Duryodhana was too pleased to see the grandsire in excellent form.

Arjuna came up to Bhishma, keeping Shikhandin before him as protection. They both shot sharp arrows at Bhishma. The Kaurava princes sensed the danger and came to protect Bhishma from Shikhandin but they were engaged by the Pandava warriors. And a terrible fight ensued. Arjuna keeping himself crunching behind Shikhandin shot deadly arrows at Bhishma's chest. So sure, so fast and thick were these arrows that Bhishma knew that they did not come from Shikhandin's bow.

The long awaited moment had come. Bhishma had decided to renounce his mortal coil. Krishna too knew the time had come. He urged Arjuna to finish his job. Arjuna, from behind Shikhandin, sent arrow after arrow with lightning speed and Bhishma stood silent, smiling. Sharp and deadly arrows, flying fast pierced him by hundreds. He bristled with arrows; their was hardly and space left for another arrow.

Bhishma pressed his lips hard and hurled a javelin at Arjuna. It

came fast and flaming like a thunderbolt, but Arjuna skillfully intercepted it with his five divine arrows, and it fell to the ground broken into five pieces. Finally, Bhishma fell down from his schariot so pierced and covered with arrows that his body did not touch the ground.

The sun in south solstice touched the horizon in the west. The battle ceased. The war-drums, pipes and tabors were hushed into silence. The gods, who had collected above in the sky to withness the wonderful sight, rained soft, fragrant flowers. The warriors from both sides gathered round him and paid their respects. The Kauravas broke down and wept. The sons of Pandu, and the sons of Dhritarashtra shared the same sorrow. The night had set in. Gradually the warriors left one by one, and Bhishma closed his eyes in deep mediation.

**Karna and the Grandsire**

In the silence of the night, Karna hurried to the place where Bhishma lay wounded and dying. Karna had stayed out of war, because of his hostility towards Bhishma. At last, the two great warriors, so noble and so large hearted, who could not see eye to eye earlier, were together.

Karna came, prostrated at Bhishma's feet and said, "O ancient of the race, my humble salutation to you. I am Karna, Radha's son son, who incurred your disfavour."

"No, my son," said Bhishma, "You are not Radha's son. You are the Sun-born Kunti's son. I know it from the all-knowing sage, Narada. I never disfavoured or disloiked you. I was harsh to you simply because of your unfounded hatred for the Pandavas. You are a great warrior and so generous. I bear you no ill-will. The Pandavas are invincible. Krishna is with them. Where Krishna is, there is victory. Let the war cease. Make peace with your brothers, the Pandavas. It is my dying wish. You can fulfil it."

Karna humbly returned, "Grandsire, I know I am the Surya-born Kunti's first son. I know the Pandavas cannot be defeated, and yet fight son. I know the Pandavas cannot be defeated, and yet fight I must. I own it to Duryodhana, my beloved friend. I cannot be false

to my salt. Permit me to fight for Duryodhana. Forgive me for hurting you knowingly or unknowingly. I earnestly seek your blessings."

Bhishma embraced Karna with his right arm, blessed him, and gave his permission to fight saying. "Go my son, my blessings on you. Follow your dharma as a kshatriya, fight with valour without anger, without hope, and you will have what you crave for. You will be immortal and ever remembered for your heroic deeds."

Radheya once again saluted the grandsire, took leave of him and stole back to his tent.

**The Great Drona**

With the fall of Bhishma, the sun of the Kaurava princes had set. They were desperate and confused. Karna was their only hope. They went to him and sought his advice. And they chose Drona, the great as their supreme commander. Drona was the senior most in every respect. In archery he had no equal.

It was the eleventh day of the great war. Duryodhana requested guru Droan to capture Yudhisthira alive, so that he might be enticed to play another round of the game of dice and defeated. It appeared to be far more easier a course to achieve than a defeat in the war. Drona agreed to do so one condition. Provided Arjuna was not in the neighbourhood to protect Yudhisthira, he would capture him alive. This news leaked to the Pandavas, and they protected Yudhisthira from all sides.

The battle resumed and combats began. Bhoorisravas fought with Shikhandin, Alambusa with Ghatotkacha, Chekiana Avanti, Virata engaged Karna. Abhimanyu amazed all with his spectacular valour. He had a fierce duel with mighty Staya. Many other warriors fought with one another vying in the art of war.

Seeing Yudhisthira alone for a moment, Drona rushed there to capture him. Fighting furiously he made straight for Yudhisthira. His sharp arrows cleaved apart the enemy defences. Yudhisthira taken by surprise, fought heroically, but was unable to withstand Drona's fury. Dhrishtadyumna rushed to Yudhisthira's help. And

then came Satyaki and Drupada to protect Yudhisthira; even their combined attempt failed to check the on-slaught of terrible Drona. But then, to a great chagrin of Drona, Arjuna appeared on the scene, and her rained arrows on Drona and his army. Soldiers dies in thick numbers. From his formidable Gandiva issued arrows with lightning speed, making the sky dark. Arjuna's face flamed with anger. He looked like the god of Death himself. Drona had to beat his retreat, without taking Yudhisthira captive.

The sun had already set in the west, and the night had set in. The fight ceased and the armies withdrew for the day. The warriors began to return to their respective camps talking. Thus ended the eleventh day of the great war, and the first day of Drona's command.

The night wore on, and the second day of Drona's leadership dawned bright and smiling. Duryodhana and Drona were busy planning their strategy for the day, when Susharma the Trigata king appeared on the scene. He bore and old grudge against Arjuna. They were five brothers and were known as Samaspatakas. They took a terrible oath in the presence of fire, and all the warriors to kill Arjuna or to be killed by him.

The Trigarta brothers pressed forward and challenged Arjuna to fight. Arjuna took Yudhisthira's permission, for it was customary with Arjuna never to refuse a challenge. He left behind Satyajita, the Panchala prince, to protect Yudhisthira.

Arjuna blew his conch Devadatta so fiercelly that it rent the air and the warriors were startled. The battle began and Arjuna single-handed returned Trigatra's attack dextrously. The Trigarta brothers were excellent warriors, but Arjuna was more than a match to their combined strength. The fight then continued for long, but then they were worsted. Except Susharma all the other brothers got slain at Arjuna's hands. Susharma grew furious. Rallying his fleeing army, he fought with renewed vigour. He began to harass Arjuna with a rain of his arrows. Arjuna, invoking gods and incanting mantras sent two weapons in succession, creating a storm and the shower of arrows from the enemy ceased. The shafts of Susharma flew away like dried leaves in a storm. A

great number of warriors fell on Trigartas side.

Meanwhlile, Drona attacked Yudhisthira with full force, with intention to capture him alive in the absence of Arjuna.

As Drona advanced towards Yudhisthira, he was checked by Dhrishtadymna. Drona knew that he was destined to die at Dhrishtadymna's hand. Avoiding him and steering his chariot in another direction, drona attacked Drupada. Durmukha, a brother of Duryodhana engaged Dhrishtadyumna, and Drona somehow managed to reach near Yudhisthira. Satyajita clashed with Drona and fought bravely, but was ultimately killed by Drona. the Pandava army became desperate and tried their utmost to prevent Drona from capturing Yudhisthira. In the attempts several warriors got slain, and Drona's dance of death continued.

Sensing the imminent danger, Yudhisthira fled away riding a fast horse. Arjuna had told him to do so in case Satyajita was killed and Drona tried to capture him. Drona failed in his attempt to capture Yudhisthira, but none could stop him from slaughter. Many valiant princes and warriors were mercilessly slain by furious Drona on that day.

**Bhagdatta's Fall**

Seeing the enemy forces so routed and demoralized, Duryodhana was immensely pleased. He told Karna that the Pandavas would think twice before waging war against him again. But Karna checked him saying, "Do not forget, the Pandava princes are very powerful. They are not likely to forget their past insults. My friend, this sense of security is false. See there, Bhima, supported by other heroes is making a concerted attack on Drona. Let us rush to the assistance of great Acharya."

They reached with their elephant division on the scene, and a terrible batte raged. Bhima began to slaughter the elephant army with his sharp, swift flying shafts. Terrified elephants bolted trampling their own soldiers and men. The horses took fright and ran away form the field and there was a great confusion and panic.

Seeing the Kaurava division thus confused, Bhagdatta, the brave

king of Pragajyotisha, came riding his wonderful elephant called Supritika. In anger he charged on Bhima. The magnificent elephant, Supritika dashed against Bhima's chariot, and reduced it into a shapeless mass. However, Bhima escaped unhurt by jumping off his car in time. The elephant harassed Satyaki and Abhimanyu as well. This single elephant and its rider, brave Bhagdatta caused havoc to the great pleasure of the Kauravas. Bhima could do nothing against the animal.

In the meantime, Arjuna having defeated and annihilated Trigartas turned towards the scene of the present fight. And it made a great difference in the scene. Dramatically, the things began to change. The shouts of job of the Kaurava army immediately subsided. Bhagdatta attacked Partha with his formidable elephant, and a terrible exchange of shafts ensued. Bhagdatta tried to smash Arjuna's shariot, but missed it by a hair's breadth, because of Krishna's timely manoeuvre of the chariot. Bhagdatta hurled powerful javelins and saktis, but Arjuna intercepting broke them to pieces. Enraged Bhagdatta hurled the goad of the elephant, invoking Vishnu. Stepping forward, Krishna took the terrible weapon on his chest, and it turned into a garland.

With the failure of the Vaishnavastra, the invincibility of Bhagdatta was over. He stood defenceless like any other common man. Arjuna shot a fatal arrow in the centre of the elephant's forehead. The elephant fell dead crying. With another such an arrow, he pierced Bhagdatt's chest, and he fell down dead from his ride. Arjuna came down his chariot and cicumambulated the dead Bhagdatta, for he was one of the most illustrious, brave and pious of ancients.

Bhagdatta's death created panic in the Kaurava army. Shakuni's two brothers, rallying their forces attacked Arjuna, but they met the fate of Bhagdatta and Shakuni had to flee as fast as he could. The fight continued till past sunset. Drona then ordered to cease fighting and the warriors returned to their camps staking of Arjuna's valour, Bhagdatta's fate and Drona's failure in capturing Yudhisthira. The Pandava soldiers sat around camp-fires and enjoyed themselves, while the opposite camp remained drowned in

deep gloom. Thus ended the twelth day of the great war.

**Abhimanyu The God-like Lad**

The third day of Drona's great leadership dawned in full splendour. The Pandava forces were arrayed in wheel-formation. In the centre of the wheel, Duryodhana rode a magnificent chariot, with a snow-white royal canopy over his head. Aswathama and his brothers were by his side; Karna, Dushasana, Kripa and Jayadritha surrouneded him. The outer ring was formed of Shakuni, Salya, Kritvarman, Sala and Bhoorisravas. Dronacharya rode a beautiful chariot at the outer ring of the wheel-formation.

The battle had begun early in the morning with the Trigartas challenging Arjuna was fighting Trigartas on the southern front, far away from the scene of the main battle.

Bhima led his forces, supported by Satyaki, Drupada, Dhrishtadyumna, Shikhadin, Ghatotkacha, Nakula Sahadeva and many others. The fight began and the Kaurava army unitedly attacked Yudhisthira. The counter- attack of Bhima and other generals was almost warded off by Drona's onslaught.

Yudhisthira found himself in a fix. Only Arjuna, Krishna, Pradyumna and Abhimanyu knew how to penetrate the Chakravyuha. Arjuna was fighting the Trigratas away from the scene. Therefore, Yudhisthira sent for Abhimanyu, the young godlike son of Arjuna and Subhadra. Abhimanyu was his only hope. He entrusted to him the formidable task of penetrating the wheel-formation. Abhimanyu gladly accepted the herocic assignment. But he knew only how to penetrate the Vyuha, not to extricate himself out of the of the web of Vyuha. That was the only worry. So, they decided to follow Abhimanyu immediately after he broke open a passage in the Vyuha.

Yudhisthira blessed the youth, and he speed towards Kaurava lines. With lightning speed he drove through the enemy formation. The impregnable Vyhu broke and there was panic. Routing the enemy ranks, he stood in the centre of the Vyuha, before Duryodhana. Alarmed Drona, Karna, Aswathama, Kripa and others rushed to protect Duryodhana. Abhimanyu faced their combined attack

undauntedly and single-handed.

The Pandava generals had tried hard to enter the Vyuha in his wake, but the breach had closed immediately after Abhimanyu's entrance. They were barred by Jayadratha. He had sealed the opening and Bhima and all others were rendered helpless. They horrified to think of the inevitable.

Abhimanyu fought furiously. He looked like the noon-sun of Dissolution. Smashing chariots, horses and braking the bows of the Kaurava generals, he consumed the enemy forces as fire consumes the dry grass. He withstood the combined and simultaneous attack of Karna, Shakuni, Salya, Aswathama and others like a granite rock standing against the fury of surging ocean waves.

Karna consulted Drona and Asked him how Abhimanyu could be killed. Drona said, "Abhimanyu is a brave lad like his father. He is a matchless boy-warrior. His armour and weapons make him invulnerable. Kill his horses and charioteers, destroy his bow-string and make him defenceless. When it is achieved, and he turns round, all of you strike simultaneously from behind and kill. That is the only way.

Accordingly they all attacked the brave youth. Karna shot an arrow from behind and shattered his bow. Kritvarman killed his horses, and Kripa his twin charioteers. Thus deprived of his bow horse, and charioteers, Abhimanyu fought desperately with a sword and a shield. He jumped off his immobile chariot and rushed at the six veteran warriors. All of sudden, Drona shot a sharp arrow and cut Abhimanyu's sword at the hilt. Karna shattered his shield with his sharp shafts, and he stood completely defenceless, waithing to be slain at the hands of these warriors.

In desperation, Abhimanyu snatched a mace from his chariot and challenged them for a single combat. He said, "Come one by one, and I will fight it to the finish." But his words proved a cry in wilderness. Then, he rushed at Aswathama, the son of Dronacharya. Seeing the death-like Abhimanyu advancing, Aswathama quickly jumped down his car and escaped death. The chariot was broken into pieces.

Dushasana's son leapt up to Abhimanyu with a mace, and both were locked in a deadly duel. Their maces clashed together and they toppled over simultaneously. Dushasana's son was quickly on his feet again, and before the fatigued Abhimanyu could get up he raised his mace high and hit him hard on the head, and killed him.

Thus, a god-like lad, Abhimanyu was treacherously murdered by many warriors of proven warskill and ability. Drona, Aswathama, Dushasana, Jayadratha and others, all had soiled their hands with the blood of this youth of sixteen. This was one of the blackest days of the great war, when the Kauravas thus overpowered and killed a mere lad, who had wrought havoc in their ranks a few moments back, like an elephant crushing lillies in a pond.

Abhimanyu lay slain and covered in blood. The Kauravas danced around the dead youth like barbarians. They blew their conches, shorted for joy and the tumut rent the air. Their victory-cry was heard by Yudhisthira and Bhima. They at once knew that their dear son Abhimanyu was slain. terror-stricken Yudhisthira fell in swoon. The worst had happened and they did not know how fot face it. When Yudhisthira came to his senses, he again broke into a flood of tears loudly lamenting Abhimanyu's death. He did not know what would he say to Arjuna. How would he face Subhadra? He felt guilty for sending Abhimanyu to penetrate the chakravyuha.

Arjuna was returning triumphant, but ill-omens disturbed him and spoiled his joy of victory. In the thickening gloom of night, he had forebodings. On his return to the camp, he was received by death-like silence. As usual, Abhimanyu did not issue forth form his tent to welcome him. He went to Yudhisthira's tent and found him sunk in deep despair. None dared to speak to Arjuna, or to see in his face. He questioned his brothers about Abhimanyu, about their despair, about the ominous mournful silence and in answer, he got only sobs and sobs. Knowing without being told in words what worst had be fallen, Arjuna the bereaved father instantly broke down and fainted. When he got up he lamented, "Who has killed my darling son? How could it happen? He was so brave and invincible. There must have been some foul play."

Krishna held Arjuna's hand in his and consoled. He spoke to him words full of deep wisdom and comfort. Then, Yudhisthira began the tragic and heroic tale of young Abhimanyu, but before he could come to the middle, he broke down. Bhima took up the thread and continued, but he too broke down, and ultimately it was Sahadeva, who somehow concluded the pathetic narration.

It was terrible hard for Arjuna to hear the tragic tale. He trembled in anger, his throat got choked and he vowed a terrible oath, "I swear by my Gandiva to kill Jayadratha tomorrow before sun set. If I do not, let hell and damnation by my sure lot. It I do not destroy him by tomorrow, I will resort to self- immolation."

Arjuna picking up his Gandiva, twanged it lustily. Krishna blew his conch, Panchajanya. The tremendous tumult filled the universe and struck terror in the hearts of the Kauravas. The Kaurava spies went to Duryodhana and reported the terrible vow of Arjuna. It sent shiver down the spine of Jayadratha. Terrified, he wanted to run away, but Duryodhana assured him complete protection and safety. Drona also encouraged him saying many words of widom. He left reassured and his self-confidence returned.

**Abhimanyu Avenged**

The next day, the sun rose like a lion coming out of his den, chasing the herd of darkness away, and with it the fourteenth day of the great war dawned. It was the fourth day of Dronacharya's command. The war began. Arjuna consumed with the single thought of avenging Abhimanyu, sped in his flaming chariot, driven by Krishna. He cut his way through line after line of chariots, elephants and foot-soldiers. The four quarters resounded with the tumult and clamour.

Far away, protected by mighty Karna, Bhoorisravas, Aswathama, Salya, Kripa and others, at the back of the Vvuha was Jayadratha. the great Dronacharya stood guard over the army formation. At the opening of the Vyuha stood brave Durmarshana, the brother of Duryodhana.

Arjuna pierced the enemy lines and sent the Kauravas army flying in panic. Durmarshana fought valiantly but then had to flee before

the fire of Arjuna's weapons. Arjuna kept on his vistorious advance defeating Dushasana and his elephant division. Then, he met Drona, his guru and preceptor. They fought using their best skills. Arjuna fought desperatley, but Drona proved too strong for him. It was almost impossible to overcome the great Acharya. Krishna wheeled Arjuna's chariot in another direction to evade Drona.

There is advance was checked by Kritvarman and others, but they got worsted at the hands of furious Partha. Much time was lost in these fierce duels and the sun had begun to decline in the west. It made Arjuna worried, but at the same time it made him accelerate the havoc in the Kaurava lines. He continued his advance towards Jayadratha, cutting through the centre of the vyuha. Arjuna had to fight against time and enemy at the same time. He sped past the enemy lines killing soldiers and generalls on either side.

And now, when Arjuna had reached almost the end of his journey, Duryodhana came and stood like a rock between Arjuna and his target Jayadratha. Duryodhana challenged Arjuna and there followed a fierce duel. Duryodhana wore a charmed armour given by Drona. He fought valiantly and Arjuna's repeated arrow-attacks did not make any significant impact on him. Seeing this, Arjuna got desperate and fought desperately. He sent needle-sharp arrows piercing the unprotected parts of the body by the magic armour. Panicked Duryodhana fled in haste and Arjuna sped towards Jayadratha.

But there was not much time left. The sun would soon set frustrating Arjuna's attempts to avenge Abhimanyu on Jayadratha. After the sun set Jayadratha was safe and alive. Would Abhimanyu remain unavenged? This was the big question that ranked Arjuna, and Krishna was aware of it. Krishna knew it well that Jayadratha was protected by many valiant kings. Without overcoming them, It was well-nigh impossible to kill Jayadratha.

Krishna used his yogic powers making the sun lost in a pall of thick and huge mist. The sun set so suddently that the Kaurava generals looked at it with amazement and a sigh of relief. Jayadratha too in an unguarded moment looked at the direction of the dark sun. Arjuna, urged by Krishna, quickly shot a powerful divine astra

invoking gods. It sped like a thunderbolt severing Jayadratha's head from his body. The astra sped in the air carrying the severed head of Jayadratha with it. All of a sudden, the sun came out piercing the mist and darkness, before sinking in the west. The sun then set, and the Kauravas were sunk in the lowest depths of despair and gloom. The Pandava princes and Krishna at once blew their conches together lustly, resounding the our quarters. Duryodhana shed bitter tears at the death of Jayadratha and his heart was on the verge of bursting with anguish. He approached Drona and told him his immense grief. He had decided either to kill the Pandavas, or be killed by them. Drona was very unhappy at the plight of Duryodhana. Cheering Duryodhana up, he promised not to take off his armour until he had destroyed the Pandavas, or were killed him self in the attempt.

Tempers were frayed, passions ran high and the rules of fight and dictates of dharma were thrown overboard enmasse. The sun had set, and the night was well advanced, but the fight continued in the star-light. It was a strange and horrible sight. The armies clashed in the night. Drona fought like one possessed. Karna, and Duryodhana became the messengers of death in their unbound fury. Combats were fought and lost. The divine astras hurled, flashed into the dark sky like the meteors or the lightinings. Groping with their weapons in the darkness, they slew whosever came in their way and the heads rolled down the trunks in great number.

**Ghatotkacha is Slain**

The battle was on. In the darkness the armies clashed blindly. The arrows and astras shot just anyhow without any exact target. Somadatta and Satyaki were locked in a terrible duel. Duryodhana rushed to help Somadatta and Dhrishtadyumna came to Satyaki's help. Ghatotkacha also came and clashed with Aswathama. Bhima was scattering death.

The marvellous fight between Aswathama and Ghatotkacha was to be seen to be believed. Ghatotkacha used his weapons of illusion and Aswathama in his turn made them an exercise in futility. Sometimes the fight became quite general and sometimes the individual combats dominated.

Radheya and Arjuna fought like wild elephants, bent upon killing each other. To stop the indicriminate killings in the darkness, the foot-soldiers were made to carry torches. All of a sudden, the battlefield was filled millions of flickering and moving lamps. It presented a strange sight, the like of which had never been imagined of seen before.

Ghatotkacha and his tropps of Rakshasas fought excellently. The onset of night had increased their weird might manifold. They destroyed the enemy in thousands. When Duryodhana saw the holocaust of his men and animals, he grew desperate and sent Karna to fight Ghatotkacha.

The terrible and relentless fight continued far into night. The fight between Ghatotkacha and Karna was the most fierce. Ghatotkacha harassed Karna and fought with such a savage fury that all marvelled. The Kaurava army seemed quite at the mercy of Ghatotkacha. He used his maya-weapons and Karna went on making them ineffective with his counter-weapons and astras. The general fighting had almost stopped and the warriors began to watch the terrible duel between the two, with great interestand enthusiasm. Karna had to exert his utmost to contain Ghatotkacha, but the latter was trying to get better of Karna.

Ghatotkacha moved down the enemy in thousands with his weapons of illusion. The harassed and terror stricken Kaurava army ran in panic, crying for help and protection. They appealed Karna to destroy the Rakshasa with the Shakti.

Karna grew desperate at the great havoc Ghatotkacha had caused. He could not tolerate the rout of forces, none of his so powerful weapons were successful in containing him. Then, he thought of using his Shakti. He had no other alternative left. This mighty weapon he had obtained from Indra as a gift in exchange of his divine armour and ear-rings. He had kept it reserved for killing Arjuna. But it seemed certain that fate was against him. It could be used only once. Then it would return to its original master, Indra, the god of heavens.

Karna had to save the army. He had to think of the present

forgetting the future. In noments of desperation he too the Shakti, balanced it and hurled at Ghatotkacha. It sped at the target, and pierced through the chest of Ghatotkacha. Ghatotkacha instantly fell dead, and the Pandavas were plunged in great despair.

Bhima tore his hair in anguish at his son death. He could not be consoled. Yudhisthira tried to comfort him and said sooting words. Krishna was the happiest man. He was glad that the Shakti now cannot be used again by Karna, and Arjuna was safe. Krishna knew full well that had Karna not lost his armour and ear-rings, or had he the Shakti with him, none, not even Indra could have dare to fight with him.

Ghatotkacha's death was a great triumph for Duryodhana. Out of sheer joy Duryodhana embraced Karna, and took him to his tent. But Karna's heart sank at the very thought of what he had done. He had used the Shakti in sheer desperation against Ghatotkacha. He could not use it any more in killing Arjuna. With it his dream had been shattered. He had lost his invincibility and it made the things for Arjuna easier.

**The Fall of Drona**

The war went on, and so the holocaust continued. It was past midnight. Everybody was exhausted. Overcome with sleep and fatigue, the soldiers dropped and lay asleep. Everywhere the soldiers slept. They slept with their armours on. The battlefield looked like a beautiful painting. Warriors slept on horse backs, in chariots, on the necks of elephants, and on the bare ground. So did the war animals in harness. The battlefield was strewn with sleeping men and animals. All was silent under the magic spell of soothing sleep.

Gradually, the moon rose in the east, bright and beautiful as ever. The field was flooded with her soft and white light. The troops were awakened and the savage war began anew. The half awakened warriors fought and fell down dead in thick numbers. The slaughter went on. The moon began to lose her lustre, and grew pale, and the sun rose. And with it dawned the fiteenth day of the great war. Drona had been in command for the last four days

and the fifth had begun.

Drona consumed the enemy like a conflagration. He caused such a huge destruction that the Pandava forced fled in panic, crying. Krishna saw it and pondered over it. He knew that great Drona must die if the Pandavas were to survive. He also knew that it was well-nigh impossible to defeat and kill terrible Drona. He had no equal in archery and in the art of war. He looked more terrible than even Bhishma. He was too strong to the Pandavas, even to their combined prowess.

Krishna said to Arjuna. "He is invincible in war. Unless something is done to make him defenceless, it is impossible to contain and kill him. We have to use some ruse to kill him. As soon as he comes to know that his son Aswathama is dead, he will gave up fighting. Let some one announce that Aswathama has been slain."

It did not appeal Arjuna. Others liked it. Yudhisthira agreed to it reluctantly. Bhima immediately killed an elephant called Aswathama, with his mace and hurried in Drona's presence crying, "Aswathama is slain."

No sooner did Drona hear Bhima then he became nervous. His courage failed him. But then he thought of his son's invincibility and resumed fighting with renewed vigour, and destroyed the enemy in countless numbers. His anger took another terrible turn resulting in a fresh carnage, and thousands of warriors perished. But then Bhima's cry about his son's death knocked against his consciousness, and he made up his mind to ascertain the truth from Yudhisthira. Drona knew Yudhisthira would.

"Yudhisthira," asked Drona, "is my son Aswathama really slain?"

Yudhisthira shuddered at the very idea of telling a lie. But then Krishna hardened him saying, "If Drona continues like this even for half a day more, nothing would be left on your side. A lie told in such grim circumstances to save lives is not a sin at all."

Bhima also goaded his brother Yudhisthira to repeat the lie. He said, "I killed the elephant of the King of Malwa. It was known as

Aswathama. I shouted before Drona that Aswathama is dead, but without much effect. You tell our guru Drona that his son Aswathama is dead. He believes you."

Yudhisthira shuddered, but then he was overcome with the thought of victory and safety of his men. When Drona asked, "My son, is Aswathama truly slain." Yudhisthira replied, "Yes, Aswathama is dead," and softly added, "the elephant."

The latter words were completely drowned in the clamour and were not heard by Drona. Thus, the Dharamaputra. Yudhisthira told a deliberate lie and fell in his own eyes. Till then, Yudhisthira's chariot always remained four fingers above the ground. But now it dropped down and touched the earth. Yudhisthira committed the sin of telling a lie and sank into the crowd of ordinary mortals. Such are the ways of fate.

When Drona heard of his son's death from Yudhisthira's mouth he lost all interest in the war, he dropped his bow and arrows. He called the names of Radheya, Duryodhana and Kripacharya, advised them to fight on very carefully, and laid down his weapons. He lost the will to live and sat down in meditation on the floor of his chariot. Soon he was in trance. Then Dhrishtadymna rushed forward wielding his sword. He jumped into Drona's chariot, and cut off his head, in spite of great cried of protest from Arjuna and others. The mighty soul of great Acharya in the form of a radiance rose towards the sky and was lost to sight. Only Krishna, Yudhisthira, Kripa and Sanjay saw it soaring.

Dhrishtadyumna jumped down the chariot with the sword in one hand and Drona's severed head in the other. He threw the head on the ground. While warriors from either side cried "shame!,' he was embraced by Bhima. Thus, it was another evil day, when a revered Acharya was killed with a lie and treachery.

When Aswathama heard of this dastardly murder, he came rushing in full fury and rallied the fleeing Kaurava army. He had determined to kill Dhrishtadymna and the Pandavas with his divine weapons. Invoking the terrible Narayanastra, he hurled it, and the sky was covered with arrows and flaming discs. Everywhere there

were fires, flames and explosions from above. The people were being burnt up and there was hardly any escape.

All fell down flat weaponless on the ground prostrating before the terrible Narayanastra, as advised by Krishna. They escaped death from this divine weapon. But the, come out spurting. Bhima stoped and sipped the blood Aswathama. Aswathama accepted the challenge and they fought a long wonderful duel. Aswathama incanted and hurled a terrible fire weapon against Arjuna and his forces. People again began to burn up. Arjuna beside himself with great rage, hurled a counter-weapon, and immediately the fire and burning subsided and a cool breeze began to blow.

By then the night had set in. And Aswathama retired from the field exhausted, thinking of the next day. The Pandava army heaved a sigh of relief and retired to their tents. Aswathama spent the night in mourning his dear father, and the Kauravas crowned in despair. With Drona another great bastion of the Kauravas had fallen. Duryodhana sank to the new depths of gloom and grief, Karna consoled and comforted him, but without much success.

**Karna in Command**

The disastrous death of Drona had plunged the Kauravas headlong in despair. Their defeat almost became sure, but they were determined to fight to the last. They were Kshatriyas, and it was against their dharma to give up a fight in the middle or to surrender.

Following the death of Drona, they assembled in Duryodhana's war tent, and held a conference. In spite of great losses and mass devastation on their side, they had decided to continue the war. They knew they were fighting with their backs to the wall, yet they hoped to wrest victory from the hands of cruel destiny. They requested Karna to be their supreme commander, and to lead them in the great war to victory. He was their only hope. In him they saw a general even far more brave than Bhishma and Drona.

They brought fragrant water, poured it over Karna's head amidst chant of sacred mantras, blowing of conches, and made him their commander. It made Duryodhana exceedingly pleased. He thought the Pandavas already defeated and dead. Karna was also happy to

have an opportunity to repay. Karna was also happy to have an opportunity to repay his debts even with his life, the debt which he owed to Duryodhana.

The sixteenth day of the great war dawned, the rose smiling, and golden rays kissed the forehead of the brave Karna, the third commander of the Kaurava-sena. The brave Karna and his presence as supreme commander of the army, made the Kauravas forget the great loss of Bhishma and Drona. This was the most decisive battle and some of most fierce combats were fought during this period.

Karna shone like the sun in his magnificient chariot. With great confidence, Karna had arranged his army ranks in the crocodile Vyuha. He blew lustily his conch and twanged the mighty bow, Vijaya. The armies eager for fighting, clashed and the battle began again. Many individual combats and duels began at once. Aswathama clashed with Bhima, Vinda with Satyaki, Duryodhana with Yudhisthira. Kripa clashed with Dhrishtadymna. An interesting fight took place between Radheya and Nakula. Nakula fought with courage, but gradually got worsted. Soon he was defenceless, and his charioteer and horses were slain by Karna's sharp shafts. He was completely helpless and at the mercy of Radheya. Radheya allowed him to escape unharmed yet humiliated. Karna had promised Kunti to spare the life of the Pandavas except that of Partha. Before the fire of Karna's attack, the enemy melted. None dared to withstand his fierce attacks.

Kripa harassed Dhrishadyumna, the murderer of his brother- in-law Drona, with his fire-spitting arrows. Kritvarman humiliated Shikandin. Yudhisthira fought duel with Duryodhana, but the latter had to retire disgraced. Arjuna and Bhima were in their usual good form, and destroyed the enemy ruthlessly. The fight continued well past the sunset, but then the cease was announced and the warriors retired to their camps.

Radheya spent the night wighout a wink of sleep. He knew it was his last night. He met Duryodhana very affectionately and parted for the rest of the night. Karna remembered his past, his foster mother Radha, the meeting with his mother Kunti and the happiest moments of his life he had spent with her. One by one, all the

eventful happenings of his life marched past his eye of the mind in a colourful pageant, and his eyes grew wet and dim. The night so full of reminiscences, slowly wore on, and the great day, the seventeenth day of the great battle dawned, and the fight began once more.

Karna rode forward in his chariot driven by Salya, the mighty king of Madra. Karna saw omens boding ill, but he did not mind them. He was well past such thoughts and thinking. These were the decisive moments, and the issues were to be settled once for all. Radheya had come to fight his best and to defeat the Pandavas, or to die on the field. Warriors fell dead on either side of him as he advanced, cleaving the enemy defences. Many Panchala heroes lay dead and dying and many more waited their turn. Dhrihtadymna, Styaki, Drupada, Shikhandin, Bhima and others made a united effort to check his onslaught, but without any avail. He was terrible like Death herself.

Radheya's further advance whe checked by Yudhisthira. He challenged Radheya to a single combat. Karna accepted the challenge gladly and a fierce duel took place. In the beginning Karna did not fare so well, but gradually he came into the excellent form. He made Yudhisthira defenceless with his furious attack. His armour was broken open, and had Karna desired to kill him, he could have done it easily, but he simply touched his brother with the end of his bow, and wheeled away in another direction.

Bhima got exceedingly enraged at the insult thus offered to his elder brother, and he ran after Karna. They fought a long duel, and then finally Bhima made him swoom with his furious onslaught.

At another place Arjuna fought another blood, battle with Aswathama. Aswathama initially harassed Arjuna, but then he got furious and fought so relentlessly that Aswathama had to flee for his life. He routed the enemy raks at many other places. Karna and Yudhisthira again clashed and again Yudhisthira had to retire worsted.

Bhima continued his carnage. He roared like an angry lion as he killed. He defeated Shakuni and sent him humiliated. But Karna

was all fire. Bhima too found it difficult to withstand his attack. Karna defeated Dhrishtadymna and his associated, and they had to run away as fast as they could.

**The Death of Dushasana**

When Bhima saw Dushasana, he was roused to a great fury. He thought of redeeming his old pledge to Draupadi by killing him. They clashed. Dushasana was by no means an ordinary fighter. A long wordy duel preceded the actual fight.

Dushasana covered Bhima with a shower of his arrows, and then with a deadly arrow made him swoon. When Bhima recovered, he rushed at Dushasana with his terrible mace, and crushed his chariot. Dushasana was flung far away from the chariot, and was lying on the ground crying. Bhima at once jumped down his chariot and pounced upon the fallen Dushasana like a lion on its prey. Bhima remembered how Draupadi was belaboured, how she was dragged by her hair in the hall by this wretch Dushasana, and his eyes began to shoot sparks with anger. He looked terrible like Death- god and laughed hysterically, sending shivers down the spines of enemy warriors. Duryodhana, Kripa, Karna and Aswathama, all were reduced to helpless spectators. None moved or said a word. This was the most gruesome scene.

Bhima pressed his foot on the neck of fallen Dushasana, chopped off the right hand with his sharp sword and threw it away. He ripped open Dushasana's chest, and the blood come out spurting. Bhima stoped and sipped the blood gushing out from the wound. Bhima sucked and drank the blook with much relish. Everybody shuddered with horror. Radheya could not bear the shock and moved away more in sorrow than in anger.

**The Fall of Karna**

Karna was looking forward to fight with Arjuna. He told Salya to take him there. Salya did as was desired, and soon Karna's chariot stood in front of Arjuna. They smiled at each other and got ready for the most fierce fight ever fought on the plain of Kurukshetra.

The great duel began. Gradually the fight warmed up. They hurled

might astras and counterastras at each other. They were bent upon killing each other. The duel was well-balanced and equally matched. The warriors watched the fight with great interest and bated breath. Gods collected above in the sky to witness the wonderful fight between Karna and Arjuna. The famous and mighty bows of Karna and Arjuna, called Vijaya and Gandiva twanged every new and then, and echoed the four quarters.

They covered each other with showers of sharp arrows. Karna cut the bow-string of Arjuna several times, but Arjuna replaced it with such dexterity that it pleased Karna. He felt proud of his younger brother. But then, the anger of both the heroes rose high.

In his great rage, Karna took out the terrible Nagastra fitted it on his bow, aimed at Arjuna, drew the bow-string upto his ear and shot the arrow. The astra sped hissing like a serpant, lightning a trail in the air. Everybody felt sure of Arjuna's death. Krishna saw the terrible weapon coming. He quickly pressed the chariot hard with his feet. The horses knelt down under the pressure, and the chariot sank five fingers deep into mud and mire. The deadly weapon just missed its mark and knocked down the gem studded crown of Arjuna instead. The weapon that would have killed Arjuna failed, because of timely help from Krishna in the form of astute management of the chariot at the cirtical juncture.

A naga emerged from the astra and returned to Karna and said, "Use me again. New look at well and shoot and Arjuna will be killed." But Karna replied scornfully, "I seek no help from others. I depend on myself. I never use a weapon twice. Therefore, begone before I kill you."

The fight weat on. But the moment of Karna's death had arrived. The Fate had already decided the course of coming dreadful event. Suddenly the left wheel of Karna's chariot sank and was caught up in bloody mud. The wheel had sunk far deep into the mire. Karna saw it and was greatly distressed.

Karna jumped down his chariot the bent to life the wheel up from the mire. He said to Arjuna, "Wait a moment. My chariot wheel has sunk down deep in the mire. You are a great and righteous

warrior. I am sure you will not take advantage of this unforeseen predicament I am in. Let me raise the chariot wheel and then we will fight.'"

Arjuna hesitated and stopped. But Krishna intervening said, "So now you talk of dharma and righteousness. Have you forgotten how Draupadi was insulted in the court, while she was in period and in a single dress. It was done in your presence. And again, just four days back, you all killed young Abhimanyu so unrighteously. Six of you veteran warrior killed that youth, and he had no weapon." Krishna trembled with rage as he uttered these words.

Karna knew that what Krishna said true. He did not reply, and struggled hard to pull the wheel out of mud. But failling in his attempt, he got up his stuck up chariot. He took his bow and shot a terrible arrow at Arjuna. It struck Arjuna on the chest and he fainted, but Arjuna soon recovered. Karna wanted to use the respite thus got to raise his wheel out of mud. He again got down and tried to lift up the wheel.

Meanwhile, Arjuna, urged by Krishna, shot a terrible arrow, determined to kill Karna then and there. Karna was still trying to lift up the chariot wheel, with his head bent down. The arrow came speeding like a thunderbolt and Karna's head was severed instantly from his body. the head fell down on the ground. A radiance left the dead body of Karna and soared high slowly towards the Sun.

The glory and grandeur that was Karna had now passed away. It was the seventeenth day of the great war. The sun suddenly grew dim and dark for a few moments. Duryodhana shed hot tears that scorched the earth. He was dumb with sorrow and presented a very pathetic picture. Salya comforted and consoled him. Other's came and said soothing words, but nothing could soothe the wounds of bereaved Duryodhana. All though the night he sat mourning and lamenting.

Arjuna and Krishna blew their conches in triumph happy at their greatest achieve. The Pandavas were ment. The sun did not set on such a ghastly way ever before or after.

**Salya is Slain**

Krana's death plunged Duryodhana in and ocean of abysmal sorrow. He sat weeping tears hot and bloody all through the night. He was not to be consoled at all. All hopes had perished with valiant Karna. Bhima had butchered most of his brave brothers. Bhishma was slain with guile and deceit, and so was aged great Drona. And now, Karna lay killed on the battlefield, murdered foully at the hands of cruel and relentless Fate. He saw despair and destruction all around. But even then he hoped for a brighter tomorrow, and took heart. He consulted his remaining friends and heroes, to decide the future course of action. There were Aswathama, Kripa, Kritvarman, Salya, Shakuni and a handful of others.

They decided to make great Salya, their commander. Salya the king of Madra, and brother of Madri, the mother of Pandava twins, Nakula and Sahadeva, was fighting on the Kaurava side. He was brave and beautiful. He was glad when they chose him their leader in the great war. He said, "Duryodhana, I am happy and would live up to your trust and expectations. Yesterday, Karna had asked me just before the fight began. "If! am killed what would you do, my lord Salya? And I had told him that it would not happen. But if it so happened, I would avenge his death by slaying Arjuna and Krishna. An now the time has come to redeem my pledge. Today I will show my prowess and win the battle for your or I will die fighting bravely."

It cheered the Kaurava host, and they all together shouted for joy. Fragrant and holy water was poured over Salya, and he was made the commander of the Kaurava-sena. The shouts in the Kaurava camp made the Pandavas guess rightly that Salya had been installed as commander, and got ready with their strategy.

Salya arrayed his handful of forces into a clever battle- formation. The eighteenth day of the great war began with fierce fighting. The Kaurava army made a combined attack and individual combats were avoided. They could not afford it any longer. Blood, warm, fresh and crimson red, flowed in stream, drenching the earth. Salya pressed forward and clashed with Yudhdisthira. They fought a long

and deadly duel, raining sharp arrow and other divine astras on each other. They were bent upon to destroy each other.

Bhima rushed to help his brother, and there ensued a terrible mace duel between Salya and Bhima. But, ultimately Salya was worsted and fell down unconscious. He was carried away unconscious by Kripa to a safe place.

Salya revived soon and returned to fight with renewed vigour. The noon sun was shining brightly above. Salya in his boundless fury massacred the enemy. Arjuna, Bhima and Dhrishtadyumna were in excellent form, but even then, it became difficult to check Salya's onslaught.

It made Yudhisthira's anger rouse. He could no longer tolerate the wholesale murder of his forces. He rose to the occasion, and he pressed forward, determined to kill his mighty uncle, Salya. Yudhisthira fought like the God of Death himself. He took up a terrible golden dart. Invoking it, he furled in with a formidable force. It shone like a meteor in its course and sped towards Salya, hit him very hard, and pierced deep into his broad chest. Blood came out spurting from the wound and he lay dead on the ground.

At the fall of their commander, the Kaurava forces fled in fear, but Duryodhana came forward and rallied them. With his brave words he inspired his soldiers and the battle resumed. Duryodhana fought valiantly and repulsed ruthless enemy attacks. Bhima was in excellent form, and killed Duryodhana's remaining brothers.

Shakuni intercepted the enemy advance. With his elephant division Sahadeva and Nakula engaged him in a grim fight. The fight did not last long. The twins were to good for Shakuni, the crafty. He tried to flee, but he was hotly chased, and he had to fight. Shakuni rushed at Sahadeva with his lance. But the latter cut the lance inot two with a sharp arrow. With another deadly arrow Sahadeva chopped off his arms, and then with still antoher killed him.

Thus the great war was almost over. The eighteen Akshaunis of the Kauravas and the Pandavas were all destroyed in these eithteen fateful days. Of the eleven Kaurava Akshaunis, not a single soldier survived the war. Duryodhana, Kripe Kritvarman and Aswathama

were the sole Survivors on their side. Of the seven Pandava Akshaunis only two thousand chariots, seven hundred elephants, one thousnad horses and ten thousnad foot soldiers remained. Thus, the two mighty armies, like two mighty rivers got lost in the vast sands of the great war.

**The Death of Durodhana**

Duryodhana wounded and weeping fled from the battlefield in terror. His whole frams was burning up. He walked in sheer desperation, not knowing where to go. Mace in hand, he wandered afflicted with mental angusih and physical pain. He came across and expanse of water, cool and placid. He decided to cool his burning limbs in the water of the lake, and entered it. He solidified the waters of the lake called Dwaipayana, with his maya tactics ana lay down hidden from view.

In the afternoon, Kripa, Aswathama and Kritavarman, the sole remanent of the Kaurava army went to Duryodhana and reuested him to come out the lake. They wanted to resume the fight under his command. He was happy to know that they were still alive and ready to fight the enemy. But Duryodhana wanted to fight the next day, as evening had already set in, and he was deadly tired and badly wounded.

Aswathama swore to kill the Pandavas that very day and retraced his steps with his companions. By chance a few hunters had seen them conversing with Duryodhana, hiding under waters. They went and reported the matter to the Pandavas, expecting a great reward. The Pandavas, accompanied by Krishna, Dhrishtadyumna, Shikhandin and the sons of Draupadi hurried to the lake. The sun was about to set in the west. They reached the lake and saw the solidified waters. Addressing Duryodhana who was hiding under the waters, Yudhisthira said, "Come out, Duryodhana, and fight. Don't be a coward you are a Kshatriya. Come fight and kill us or be killed."

Duryodhana from within the lake returneqd, "Yudhisthira, don't think I am afriad. I am just tired and want to have some rest. We shall fight tomorrow."

Yudhisthira said," Come out, cousin, and fight. Let the kingdom be the stake.

"I do not want the kingdom any more," said Duryodhana." All my dear and near ones are dead. The kingdom has lost its charm without them. You have it from me and enjoy. Tomorrow I shall repair to the forest and become an ascetic.

Cut to the quick with these inpertinent words, Yudhisthira said, "I don't need this generaous gift of yours. Whate right have you now no this kingdom to give me away as a gift? I am a kshatriya and know how to wrest it from your hands by defeating you.

There was time when you were not prepare to give us even the five villages. You deceifully coverted all our land and kingdom. How have you grown so generous all of a sudden! Come out, and fight. The sins committed by you can be expiated only your death. I cannot be satisfied with nothing less.

The taunts of Yudhisthira agitated Duryodhana. He decided to come out of the waters. The insulting remarks of Yudhisthira were too much He said, "I am not scared of any of you. I can kill you even now single-handed. But I am alone and you are so many. Morevor, I am without chariot, without weapon and without armour. How unrighteous of you all to attack me like this!"

Infuriated with taunts, Duryodhana came out pushing the waters aside violently, mace in hand. He walked up the shore like an elephant wounded and enraged, and shouted, "Come one by one. In challenge you to a single combat. I am sure to kill all of you in a fair fight."

"Come and choose any of us for the single duel. Kill, and win the kingdom at stake, or die and ascend the heaven. Come, put on your armour and get ready for the duel."

Krishna thought it too rash on Yudhisthira's part to stake the kingdom like that. What, if Duryodhana chose any one of the Pandavas except Bhima? But Yudhisthira's gambling habit had prevailed. Habits die hard. In a fair fight no one could withstand him, and it worried Krishna. But unfortunately for the Pandavas,

Duryodhana chose Bhima for the duel.

Bhima advanced with his terrible mace and reminded Duryodhana of all his sinful acts. Sneering at Bhima's words, Duryodhana rushed at Bhima. The deadly maces clashed and sparks shot out. The duel was equally poised. They fought well and long and other outcome remained uncertain. They both were the masters of the art of mace-fighting.

Meanwhile, illustrious Balrama appeared on the scene. He had heard from the sage Narada about the mace-duel to be fought between his two famous disciples. So, he had arrived at Samantapanchaka, the place where this grand but tragic scene was being enacted, was so. Everybody was happy to receive Balrama. Duryodhana and Bhima bowed before Balrama and the fight went on.

While the duel went on, the great spectators conversed with one another. They talked as to who was superior of the two combatants and deserved to win Krishna thought Duryodhana was superior. He was nimble, quick and skillful, but Bhima matched these with his greater strength. The fight went on, and they rested for a few moments in between the bouts out of exhaustion.

Duryodhana, circling round Bhima dealt him a severe blow with his uplifted mace, and Bhima fainted. Recovering very soon he attacked. Duryodhana instantly jumped up high into the air and saved himself clean. Again Bhima hit him hard, but again Duryodhana dodged the attack.

In the meantime, when Bhima looked at Krishna for a moment, Krishna slapped his own thigh lustily. Bhima took the cue. Again Bhima hit at Duryodhana's chest, but the latter again jumped up to evade the mace. But this time Bhima struck his thighs forcefully. They were broken and he fell down. Bhima pounced upon the felled Duryodhana and pressed his head hard under his foot.

Distressed Yudhisthira rushed to prevent Bhima from repeating the dastardly act. He said, "Bhima, no. He is a prince and our cousin. It is not proper to kick him when he is lying wounded on the ground. Though fallen, he deserves our pity and respect." His eyes

welled up and he was shocked.

The great Balrama, seeing this unfairness on the part of Bhima could not contain his wrath. He was furious that Duryodhana was unjustly hit below the navel. In his fury, he rushed at Bhima to avenge the treacherous death of his favourite pupil Duryodhana, with his famous plough uplifted and ready to strike Bhima. But in time, Krishna rushed and held Balrama and said, "Bhima has just redeemed his pledge made in the presence of Drauapadi and the princess. The Pandavas have been subjected to great injustice and insults all these years at the hands of Kauravas. Please bear with the Pandavas. Don't forget that Kaliyuga has already set in, and we cannot expect unmixed righteousness for now on."

Balrama remained unconvinced by these fallacious arguments of Krishna, and declaring Bhima as cooked and shameless, drove away to Dwarka.

With the departure of Balrama, the tension was removed and the Pandavas shouted for joy. They embraced one another. Bhima was lustly cheered and congratulated on his victory. Krishana said, "Leave this wretch of Duryodhana here. Let us not kill him. He is worth the trouble. Why waste labout on something worse than a piece of broken wood."

In the meantime, Duryodhana suffered untold agony and anguish. He raised him with great efforts on his haunches and said, "Krishna, you slave of Kansa have no sense of shame? You made Bhima hit me unfairly below the waist. You had Bhishma killed treacherously, so was great Drona slain. Again it was you who shamelessly made Arjuna slay dear and brave Radheya even as he tried to lift up his chariot well out of the mud."

"You Duryodhana, "said Krishna, "are you reaping the bitter fruits of your sins and adharma. Bhishma, Drona and Karna were killed because they took side of unrighteousness. Heve you forgotten my peace efforts? But your wickedness prevailed and the war became inevitable. Your history is an unending tale of sins and wickedness. How treacherously was Abhimanyu slain defenceless by all all you! For that sin you deserve thousand deaths."

Duryodhana returned, "I am learned, have studied Vedas and scriptures. I have ruled the entire earth as a sovereign. All joys that even gods would envy have been mine. Soon I shall join my brothers and friends in the heaven. Who is more fortunate than I am? While you are doomed to live and linger on this land so desolate and grief laden."

Fragrant, celestial flowers rained from above on Duryodhana even as he uttered these words. Soft, sweet and heavenly music was being played by the Gandharavas. The sky was clear and bright like a jem, wearing a heavenly smile. But Krishna was not sorry at all. He took all responsibility on himself of unfairness committed by the Pandavas.

The sun was setting in the west. Krishna led the Pandavas to their tents for rest. They left the scene blowing their conches, leaving alone the dying Kaurava king.

**Grismadevi** (*goddess of summer*)

Seasonal goddess. Buddhit-Lamaist [Tibet]. Also an attendant of Sridevi. Usually accompanied by a yak. Colour red. Attributes: axe and cup.

**Gulsilia Mata**

Mother goodess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). A *Sakti* who in later Hinduism became regarded as of evil intent, inflicting sickess. Particularly known from Bengal.

**Gur-Gyi Mgon-Po**

God of tents. Duddhist-Lamaist [Tibet]. A form of Mahakala usually attended by a man. Colour: blue Attributes: club, cup and knife.

**Guru?**

The word Guru is so widely used nowadays to the extent of calling someone a "Guru of Wall Street". Most people think that "teacher" is the meaning of the word Guru. But in Hinduism, Guru means God himself.

*Only God-realized masters can be called Gurus.* Only they have

the right to demand unquestioned devotion and surrender of the free will of their followers. One of the essential qualities of a true Guru is Omnipresence.

The majority of the so-called Gurus are merely teachers. No one becomes a Guru by merely studying philosophy and religion and no one can be called a Guru merely because she/he may be an adept in verbal acrobatism.

There is no need for an aspirant fanatically to search for a Guru. *Sage Narade states that all over the world there are hundreds of Gurus. many of them living in spirit and constantly searching for worthy disciples.* So Gurus are easy to get, but it is very difficult to get faithful and obedient disciples. So if one seeks truth, hundreds of Gurus will come and knock at his/her door to deliver it. Swami Vivekananda did not pick his Guru; instead Sri Ramakrishna picked Vivekananda as his disciple.

Remember, Son, out of thousands that surrounded him, Jesus Christ chose only 12 disciples and they were just fishermen without any theological knowledge. He did not pick any learned man of that day. There are also instances in the Bible where Jesus had rebuked his disciples for want of enough faith. This again proves the fact that 'the faithful and obedient disciple' is a rare commodity and not the Guru.

Again, as per Hinduism, there are seven living masters known as *Saptha Rishis,* who take care of the world forever. They guide us constantly in our spiritual aspirations. So there is no need to crave for Gurus. What an aspirant has to follow is righteousness and truth alone.

*A true Guru is a divine gift to man. No one can become a Guru by self-proclamation.* Sage Ashtavakra, who is one of the seven ever-living masters of the world, was the Guru of King Janaka and the disciple of the materialistic King Janaka was Sage Suka, the great exponent of Bhakti Yoga. What that shows is that different Gurus exhibit different qualities even though they succeed one another.

*If we change our consciousness, if we desire for God through devotion and by selfless actions, a Guru will definitely come to us.*

*that Guru need not necessarily come in body; he/she can come in spirit also.*

It is indeed very diffcult to differentiate a true Gurn from the multitude of teachers around us. Unluckily, there are very many phony Gurus in the world today. An aspirant should be extremely careful in attaching his/her own spiritual aspirations to such phony Gurus, becauge that could bring about destruction of one's own spiritual life. As such it is better for anyone to pick up a Guru, who is living in spirit rather than living in the body (flesh). The Guru-disciple relationship is a very special relationship in Hinduism and once that relationship is made, there is no breaking away from it. Who is a true Guru? A person who gets agitated and becomes restless and who exhibits emotions is defintiely not a Guru. Unless someone is a great seeker of truth, he will not be able to recognise a true Guru, even if that Guru comes to him/her. Christlike masters can pass you by a thousand times, but if you are not communicating in their wavelength, you will never recognize them. All of us are like tiny tiny portable transistor radios, and until we tune our spiritual urge properly, we cannot hope to contact Christlike masters. They are close to each of us, but yet they cannot come to us, since we are not functionsing on their wavelength. *Again you should know that a Guru need not necessrily come in orange or Kavi robes, he/she can come in any form and in any clothes, even in a thre-piece suit.*

Hinduism bery clearly states the differences between both words. Thousands know about God and scriptures, but one in a billion realizes God. At the same time, history has shown that scriptural knowledge is not a must for God-realization. Hinduism also believes that anyone who seeks the *absolute truth will ultimately realize God.*

*That search for Truth need not necessarily be in tune with Hinduism, it can be through any other true religion.* It could be through Self-Dedicated Karma or a duty that one undertakes. For example, the souls of people like Albert Einstein, Mahatma Gandhi, Father Damien and Mother Teresa may be closer to God-realization than thousands of so-scalled Gurus parading

around the would. It is difficult for anyone to say who has attained realization and who has not. A man in Kavi (ochre) robes may sometimes be inferior to a man who sells drugs at New York's Time's Square. With our intelligence we cannot differentiate ''who is who''. Only Godrealised masters can do that. Christ did not go after the learned men of the day, but the understanding souls of the day who were on a pedestal, as far as evolution is concerned. By virtue of Karma, they were jsut fishermen, a very low caste of the time. Just think, Sage Veda Vyasa himself was a son of a woman belonging to the tribe of fishermen and Sage Valmiki was a savage, robbing people in jungles.

**Sunil Sehgal** is a seasoned researcher in Hinduism. He did his M.A. in History. He became Sadhu for a decade and visited many temples, and holy places throughout India and during this period he compiled this encyclopaedia. At present he is living in Kangra and serving the poor.

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